This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

THE FORBIDDEN WAY

GEORGE GIBBS

C. L. Bump

C. L. Bump

1911
cp
1.00

THE
FORBIDDEN WAY

THE FORBIDDEN WAY

BY

GEORGE GIBBS

AUTHOR OF

THE BOLTED DOOR, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

This One

EB4L-QNF-8FWB

THE FORBIDDEN WAY

BY

GEORGE GIBBS

AUTHOR OF
THE BOLTED DOOR, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

This One
EB4L-QNF-8FWB

COPYRIGHT, 1911, BY
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
Copyright, 1911, by Associated Sunday Magazines, Incorporated.

Published September, 1911

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Sharp Practice	1
II.	Camilla	11
III.	New York	26
IV.	The Forbidden Way	41
V.	Diners Out	53
VI.	Mrs. Cheyne	65
VII.	Braebank	80
VIII.	The Brush	97
IX.	The Shadow	114
X.	Triton of the Minnows	128
XI.	Discord	144
XII.	Tea Cups and Music	157
XIII.	Good Fishing	172
XIV.	Father and Son	184
XV.	Infatuation	200
XVI.	Old Dangers	214
XVII.	Old Rose Leaves	226
XVIII.	Combat	244
XIX.	The Lady in Gray	264
XX.	*La Femme Propose*	276
XXI.	*L'Homme Dispose*	291
XXII.	Private Matters	306
XXIII.	The Intruder	322
XXIV.	Gretchen Decides	334
XXV.	The Crisis	345
XXVI.	The Call of the Heart	358
XXVII.	General Bent	371
XXVIII.	Household Gods—and Goddesses	379

THE FORBIDDEN WAY

CHAPTER I

SHARP PRACTICE

THE young man in the swivel chair drummed with his toes against the desk, while he studied the gaudy fire insurance calendar on the wall before him. His pipe hung bowl downward from his lips, and the long fingers of one hand toyed with a legal document in his lap.

"Something new is hatching in this incubator," he muttered at last, dipping his pen in the ink bottle again. "And I think — I *think* it's an ugly duckling. Of course, it's no business of mine, but ——" He looked up suddenly as a bulky figure darkened the doorway. "Hello, Jeff!"

Jeff Wray nodded and walked to the water cooler.

"Mulrennan's been here to see you three times," said the man in the swivel chair. "Each time he's been getting madder. I wish you'd keep your appointments or get another office-boy. That man's vocabulary is a work of genius. Even you, in your happiest humors — why, what's the matter with your face?"

Wray put his fingers up. Four red streaks ran

parallel across his cheek bone. He touched the marks with his hand, then looked at his finger tips.

"Oh, that? Seems like I must have butted into something." He gave a short, unmirthful laugh. "Don't make me look any prettier, does it? Funny I didn't feel it before." And then, as he turned to the inner office, "Is Mulrennan coming back?" he asked.

"Yes, at five."

Wray glanced at the clock. "Has Bent been in?"

"No."

"When will those papers be ready?"

"To-night, if you want them."

"Good!" Wray turned, with his hand on the knob of the door. "When Pete comes, send him back. Will you, Larry?"

Larry Berkely nodded, and Wray went into the back office and closed the door behind him. He took out his keys and unlocked the desk, but, instead of sitting at once, he went over to a cracked mirror in the corner and examined his face, grinning at his image and touching the red marks with his fingers.

"That was a love-tap for fair," he said. "I reckon I deserved it. But she oughtn't to push a man too far. She was sure angry. Won't speak now for a while." He turned with a confident air. "She'll come around, though," he laughed. "You just bet she will." Then he sat down at his desk, took a photograph in a brass frame out of the drawer,

put it up against the pen-rack before him, and, folding his arms across the blotter, gazed at it steadily for a moment.

"It was a mean trick, wasn't it, Camilla girl?" he muttered, half aloud. "I'm sorry. But you've got to learn who you belong to. There can't be any fooling of other fellows around Jeff Wray's girl. I just had to kiss you — had to put my seal on you, Camilla. I reckon you put yours on me, too, black and blue." He laughed ruefully. "You'll forgive me, though. A diamond necklace or so will square *that*. You bet it will!"

He put the picture down, hid it away, and took up some papers that lay before him. But when, a while later, Larry Berkely showed Mulrennan in, they found him sitting with his face to the window, looking out with his baby stare over the hundred thousand acres of the Hermosa Company.

"Come in, Pete, and shut the door. You don't mind, Larry? Mulrennan and I have got some private business." Then, when the door was closed, he said in a half-whisper, "Well? What did you find out about the 'Lone Tree'?"

Mr. Mulrennan carefully sought the cuspidor, then wiped his brow with a dirty red handkerchief. "What didn't I find out? God, Jeff! that mine's lousy with sylvanite. The watchman was asleep, and we got in scrumpshus-like. It's half way down that short winze they made last fall. Max had put some timbers up to hide it, and we pulled 'em down. We only had matches to strike and

couldn't see much, but what we saw was a-plenty. It's the vein, all right. Holy Mother! but it started my mouth to watherin' — I haven't had a wink of shlape. Where in h——l have you been all day?"

"Business," said Jeff vaguely, "in the mountains."

"It's no time to be potherin' about wid little matthers." Mulrennan brought his huge fist down on the table. "You've got to nail this deal, Jeff, to-day."

"To-day? Bent hasn't been back."

"Well, you've got to find him — now."

"What for? See here, Pete, cool down. · Can't you see if I go after him he'll get suspicious — and then good-bye to everything. You leave this deal to me. He'll sign. Larry's drawing the lease and bond now. Maybe to-morrow ——"

"To-morrow? To-morrow will be too late. That's what I'm gettin' at. Max is ugly ——"

Wray clenched his bony fingers over the chair arm and leaned across the desk.

"Max!" he whispered angrily. "What ——?"

"He's afther more money. He talked pretty big last night, but this mo[illegible] off breathlessly [illegible]"

[illegible]

Wray got to his feet and took two or three rapid turns up and down the room.

"D —n him!" he muttered. And then suddenly, "Where is he now?"

"Up the bar playing pinochle with Fritz."

"Are you sure?"

"He was twenty minutes ago. I haven't left him a minute except to come here. Fritz is losin' money to him. I told him to. That will kape him for a while."

But Wray had already taken up his hat. "Come, let's go up there. We've got to shut his mouth some way," he said, through set lips.

"I've been promisin' myself sick, but he's a sharp one — God! But I wish them papers was signed," sighed Mulrennan.

As they passed through the office Jeff stopped a moment.

"If Bent comes in, Larry, tell him I'll be back in half an hour. Understand? Don't seem anxious. Just tell him I'm going to Denver and want to settle that deal one way or another as soon as possible."

Berkely nodded and watched the strange pair as they made their way up the street. Wray, his head down and hands in his pockets, and the Irishman using his arms in violent gestures.

"I'm *sure* it's an ugly duckling," commented the sage.

* * * * *

It was three years now since Berkely had come to Colorado for his health, and two since Fate had sent

him drifting down to Mesa City and Jeff Wray. Mesa City was a "boom" town. Three years ago, when the "Jack Pot" mine was opened, it had become the sudden proud possessor of five hotels (and saloons), three "general" stores, four barber shops, three pool rooms, a livery stable, and post office. Its main (and only) street was a quarter of a mile in length, and the plains for a half mile in every direction had been dotted with the camps of the settlers. It had almost seemed as if Saguache County had found another Cripple Creek.

A time passed, and then Mesa City awoke one morning to find that the gamblers, the speculators, and the sporting men (and women) had gone forth to other fields, and left it to its fate, and the town knew that it was a failure.

But Jeff Wray stayed on. And when Berkely came, he stayed, too, partly because the place seemed to improve his health, but more largely on account of Jeff Wray. What was it that had drawn him so compellingly toward the man? He liked him — why, he could not say — but he did — and that was the end of it. There was a directness in the way Wray went after what he wanted which approached nothing Berkely could think of so much as the unhesitating self-sufficiency of a child. He seemed to have an intuition for the right thing, and, though he often did the wrong one, Berkely was aware that he did it open-eyed and that no book wisdom or refinement would have made the slightest difference in the consummation of his plans. Berkely

was sure, as Wray was sure, that the only reason Jeff hadn't succeeded was because opportunity hadn't yet come knocking at his door. He liked Wray because he was bold and strong, because he looked him in the eye, because he gave a sense of large areas, because his impulses, bad as well as good, were generous and big, like the mountains and plains of which he was a part. His schemes showed flashes of genius, but neither of them had money enough to put them into practice. He was always figuring in hundreds of thousands or even in millions, and at times it seemed to Berkely as though he was frittering his life away over small problems when he might have been mastering big ones. At others he seemed very like Mulberry Sellers, Munchausen, and D'Artagnan all rolled into one.

What was happening now, Berkely could not determine, so he gave up the problem and, when his work was done, filled his pipe, strolled to the door, and watched the changing colors on the mountains to the east of him, as the sun, sinking lower, found some clouds and sent their shadows scurrying along the range to the southward. With his eye he followed the line of the trail up the canon, and far up above the cottonwoods that skirted the town he could see two figures on horseback coming down. He recognized them at once, even at that distance, for they were a sight to which Mesa City had become accustomed.

"Camilla and Bent," he muttered. "I'm glad Jeff's not here. It's been getting on his nerves.

I hope if Bent sells out he'll hunt a new field. There are too few women around here — too few like Camilla. I wonder if she really cares. I wonder ——"

He stopped, his eyes contracted to pin points. The pair on the horses had halted, and the man had drawn close to his companion, leaning forward. Was he fixing her saddle? An unconscious exclamation came from Berkely's lips.

"He's got his nerve — right in plain view of the town, too. What ——?"

The girl's horse suddenly drew ahead and came galloping down through the scrub-oak, the man following. Berkely smiled. "The race isn't always to the swift, Cort Bent," he muttered.

At the head of the street he saw Miss Irwin's horse turn in at the livery stable where she kept him, but Cortland Bent's came straight on at an easy canter and halted at Berkely's door.

"Is Wray there?" asked Bent.

"No, but he told me to ask you to wait. Won't you come in?"

"Just tell him I'll be in in the morning."

"Jeff may go to Denver to-morrow," said Larry, "but of course there's no hurry ——"

Bent took out a silver cigarette case and offered it to Berkely. "See here, Larry," he said, "what the devil do you fellows want with the 'Lone Tree'? Are you going to work it, or are you getting it for some one else? Of course, it's none of my business — but I'd like to know, just ——"

"Oh, I'm not in this. This is Jeff's deal. I don't know much about it, but I think he'd probably work it for a while."

Together they walked into the office, and Berkely spread some papers out over the desk. "Jeff told me to draw these up. I think you'll find everything properly stated."

Bent nodded. "Humph! He feels pretty certain I'll sign, doesn't he?"

Berkely stood beside him, smoking and leaning over his shoulder, but didn't reply.

Bent laughed. "Well, it's all cut and dried. Seems a pity to have put *you* to so much trouble, Larry. I haven't made up my mind. They say twice as much money goes into gold mines as ever comes out of 'em. I guess it's true. If it wasn't for Jeff Wray in this deal I'd sign that paper in a minute. But I've always had an idea that some day he'd make his pile, and I don't relish the idea of his making it on me. He's a visionary — a fanatic on the gold in these mountains, but fortune has a way of favoring the fool ——"

"Sounds as though you might be talking about me," said a voice from the doorway, where Jeff stood smiling, his broad figure completely blocking the entrance.

Bent turned, confused, but recovered himself with a short laugh. "Yes, I was," he replied slowly. "I've put twenty thousand dollars in that hole in the rocks, and I hate to leave it."

Jeff Wray wiped his brow, went to the cooler, drew a glass of water, and slowly drank it.

"Well, my friend," he said carelessly between swallows, "there's still time to back down. You're not committed to anything. Neither am I. Suit yourself. I'm going to get a mine or so. But I'm not particular which one. The 'Daisy' looks good to me, but they want too much for it. The terms on your mine, the 'Lone Tree,' just about suited me — that's all. It's not a 'big' proposition. It might pan thirty or forty to the ton, but there's not much in that — not away up there. Take my offer — or leave it, Bent. I don't give a d — n."

He tossed his hat on the chair, took off his coat, and opened the door of the back office.

"Larry," he added, "you needn't bother to stay, I've got some writing to do. I'll lock up when I go."

If Mr. Mulrennan had been present he would have lost his senses in sheer admiration or sheer dismay. Berkely remembered that "bluff" later, when he learned how much had depended on its success.

But it worked beautifully.

"Oh, well," said Bent peevishly, "let's get it over. I'll sign. Are you ready to make a settlement?"

CHAPTER II

CAMILLA

HER pupils had all been dismissed for the day and the schoolmistress sat at her desk, a half-written letter before her, gazing out through the open doorway over the squalid roofs of the "residence section" of Mesa City. The "Watch Us Grow" sign on the false front over Jeff Wray's office was just visible over the flat roof of the brick bank building. "Watch Us Grow!" The shadow in her eyes deepened. For two long years she had seen that sign from doorway and window of the school, and, even when she went home to Mrs. Brennan's bungalow up above, she must see it again from the veranda. Jeff's business card was the most prominent object in town, except perhaps Jeff himself. It was so much larger than it had any right to be, out of scale, so vulgar, so insistent, so — so like Jeff. Jeff had stood in the doorway of the schoolhouse while they were building his office, and, in his masterful way, had told her of the trade-mark he had adopted for his business; he wanted it in plain sight of her desk so that she could see it every day and watch Mesa City (and himself) fulfil the prophecy.

That seemed ages ago now. It was before the

"Jeff Wray" had been painted out and "Wray and Berkely" put in its place, before Larry came out, or Cortland Bent, in the days when Jeff was a new kind of animal to her, when she had arrived fresh from her boarding school in Kansas. "Watch Us Grow!" How could any one grow in a place like this — grow anything, at least, but wrinkled and stale and ugly. The sign had been a continual mockery to her, a travesty on the deeper possibilities of life which Fate had so far denied her. She shut her eyes and resolutely turned her head away, but she could not get Jeff Wray out of her mind. She was thoroughly frightened. His air of proprietorship so suddenly assumed yesterday and the brutality of his kiss had brought her own feelings to a crisis — for she had learned in that moment that their relationship was impossible. But her fingers tingled still — at the memory of the blow she had given him. She *had* promised to marry him when he "made good." But in Mesa City that had seemed like no promise at all. How could any one succeed in anything here?

She leaned forward on the desk and buried her face in her hands. What chance had she? Where was the fairy prince who would rescue her from her hut and broth kettle?

She raised her head at the sound of a voice and saw Cortland Bent's broad shoulders at the open window.

"Morning!" he said cheerfully. "You look like Ariadne deserted. May I come in?"

She nodded assent, and, thrusting her school books and unfinished letter in the desk, turned the key viciously in its lock.

"Aren't you riding to-day?" he asked from the doorway.

"No."

He came forward, sat on the top of one of the small desks facing her, and examined her at his ease.

"You're peevish — no? What?"

"Yes. I'm in a frightful mood. You'd better not stay."

He only laughed up at the sunflower dangling from the water pitcher. "Oh, I don't mind. I've a heavenly disposition."

"How do you show it?" she broke in impetuously. "Every man thinks the one way to get on with a woman is to make love to her ——"

"No — not altogether," he reproached her. "You and I have had other topics, you know — Swinburne and Shakespeare and the musical glasses."

"Oh, yes, but you always drifted back again."

"How can you blame me? If I've made love to you, it was ——"

"Oh, I know. I'm a rustic, and it's a good game."

"You're the least rustic person I've ever known," he said seriously. "It's not a game. I can't think of it as a game. It is something more serious than that." He took a few paces up and down the aisle before her and then went on.

"I know you've never been willing to give me credit for anything I've said when I've tried to show

you how much you were to me — and yet, I think you cared — you've showed it sometimes. But I've tried to go about my work and forget you, because I thought it was best for us both. But I can't, Camilla, I tell you I can't get you out of my head. I think of something else, and then, in a moment, there you are again — elusive, mocking, scornful, tender, all in a breath. And then, when I find you're there to stay, I don't try any more. I don't want to think of anything else." He leaned across the desk and seized one of her hands with an ardor which took her by storm. "You've got into my blood like wine, Camilla. To be near you means to reach forward and take you — the sound of your voice, the response of your eyes, the appeal of your mind to mine in this wilderness of spirit — I can't deny them — I don't want to deny them."

Her head sank, but she withdrew her hands. "And my sanity?" she asked clearly. "That does not appeal to you."

"Perhaps it does — most of all. It maddens me, too — that I can't make you care for me enough to forget yourself."

She looked up at him, smiling gently now. "It is easy to say forget myself, that *you* may have one more frail woman to remember. Am I so provincial, Cortland Bent? Am I really so rustic? Two days ago you were telling me I had all the *savoir faire* of the great lady."

He did not reply to that, but, while she watched him, he got up and walked slowly over to the map

of the United States which hung between the windows.

"I don't suppose it will mean anything to you when I tell you I'm going," he said bitterly.

"Going — where?"

"East."

"For long?"

"For good. I've leased the mine."

She started up from her chair, breathless, and stood poised on the edge of the platform, the slender fingers of one hand grasping the projecting edge of the desk.

"You're — going — East to — to stay?"

He did not turn, and, if he noticed any change in her intonation, he gave no sign of it.

"I've finished here. The mine is leased. I'm going back to New York."

"I can't believe — you never told me. It's curious you shouldn't have said something before."

"Why should I? No man likes to admit that he's a failure."

"You've leased the 'Lone Tree'? To whom?"

"To Wray. He made me a proposition yesterday. I've accepted it. In fact, I'm out of the thing altogether."

"Jeff? I don't understand. Why, only yesterday he ——"

Was it loyalty to Jeff that made her pause? He turned quickly.

"What — did he say anything?"

"Oh, nothing — only that the mine was a failure. That seems curious if he had decided to lease it."

"Oh!" he said smiling, "it's only Wray's way of doing business. When anything is hanging fire he always says exactly what he doesn't mean. He doesn't worry me. I've gone over that hole with a fine-tooth comb, and I'm glad to get out of it."

"And out of Mesa City?" Then, with an attempt at carelessness, "Of course we'll all miss you," she said dully.

"Don't! You mustn't speak to me in that way. I've always been pretty decent to you. You've never believed in me, but that's because you've never believed in any man. I've tried to show you how differently I felt ——"

"By kissing me?" she mocked scornfully.

Bent changed his tone. "See here, Camilla," he said, "I'm not in a mood to be trifled with. I can't go away from here and leave you in this God-forsaken hole. There isn't a person here fit for you to associate with. It will drive you mad in another year. Do you ever try to picture what your future out here is going to be?"

"Haven't I?" bitterly.

"You've seen them out on the ranches, haven't you? Slabsided, gingham scarecrows in sunbonnets, brown and wrinkled like dried peaches, moving all day from kitchen to bedroom, from bedroom to barn, and back again ——"

"Yes, yes," said Camilla, her head in her hands. "I've seen them."

"Without one thought in life but the successes of their husbands — the hay crop, the price of cattle; without other diversion than the visit to Kinney, the new hat and frock once a year (a year behind the fashion); their only companions women like themselves, with the same tastes, the same thoughts, the same habits ——"

"O God!" whispered the girl, laying a restraining hand on his arm, "don't go on! I can't stand it."

He clasped her hands in both of his own.

"Don't you see it's impossible?" he whispered. "You weren't made for that kind of thing. Your bloom would fade like theirs, only sooner because of your fineness. You'd never grow like those women, because it isn't in you to be ugly. But you'd fade early."

"Yes," she said, "I know it."

"You can't stay. I know, just as you know, that you were never meant for a life like that — you weren't meant for a life like this. Do you care what becomes of these kids? No matter how much chance you give them to get up in the world, they'll seek their own level in the end."

"No, I can't stay here." She repeated the phrase mechanically, her gaze afar.

"I've watched you, Camilla. I know. For all your warm blood, you're no hardy plant to be nourished in a soil like this. You need environ-

ment, culture, the sun of flattery, of wealth — without them you'll wither ——"

"And die. Yes, I will. I could not stand this much longer. Perhaps it would be better to die than to become the dull, sodden things these women are."

"Listen, Camilla," he said madly. He put his arms around her, his pulses leaping at the contact of her body. Her figure drooped away from him, but he felt the pressure of her warm fingers in his, and saw the veins throbbing at her throat and temples, and he knew that at last she was awakened. "You must come with me to the East. I won't go without you. I want you. I want to see you among people of your own sort. I'll be good to you — so gentle, so kind that you'll soon forget that there ever was such a place as this."

His tenderness overpowered her, and she felt herself yielding to the warmth of his entreaty. "Do you really need me so much?" she asked brokenly.

His reply was to draw her closer to him and to raise her lips to his. But she turned her head and would not let him kiss her. Perhaps through her mind passed the memory of that other kiss only yesterday.

"No, I'm afraid."

"Of me? Why?"

"Of myself. Life is so terrible — so full of meaning. I'm afraid — yes, afraid of you, too. Somewhere deep in me I have a conscience. To-day you appeal to me. You have put things so clearly — things I have thought but have never dared speak

of. To-day you seem to be the only solution of my troubles ——"

"Let me solve them then."

"Wait. To-day you almost seem to be the only man in the world — almost, but not quite. I'm not sure of you — nor sure of myself. You point a way to freedom from this — perhaps a worse slavery would await me there. Suppose I married you ——"

"Don't marry me then," he broke in wildly. "What is marriage? A word for a social obligation which no one denies. But why insist on it? The real obligation is a moral one and needs no rites to make it binding. I love you. What does it matter whether ——"

His meaning dawned on her slowly, and she turned in his arms, her eyes widening with bewilderment as she looked as though fascinated by the horror she read in his words. He felt her body straighten in his arms and saw that the blood had gone from her face.

"Do I startle you? Don't look so strangely. You are the only woman in the world. I am mad about you. You know that? Can't you see? Look up at me, Camilla. There's a girl in the East they want me to marry — of an old line with money — but I swear I'll never marry her. Never!"

Slowly she disengaged his arms and put the chair between them. There was even a smile on her lips. "You mean — that I — that you ——" She paused, uncertain of her words.

"That I'll stick to you until Kingdom Come," he assented.

Her laugh echoed harshly in the bare room. "Whether you marry the other girl or not?"

"I'll never marry the other girl," he said savagely, "never see her again if you say so ——"

He took a step toward her, but she held up her hand as though warding off a blow.

"One moment," she said, a calm taking the place of her forced gayety, her voice ringing with a deep note of scorn. "I didn't understand at first. Back here in the valley we're a little dull. We learn to speak well or ill as we think. At least, we learn to be honest with ourselves, and we try to be honest with others. We do not speak fair words and lie in our hearts. Our men have a rougher bark than yours, but they're sound and strong inside." She drew herself to her full height. "A woman is safe in this country — with the men of this country, Mr. Bent. It is only when ——"

"Camilla! Forgive me. I was only trying you. I will do whatever you say — I —— "

She walked to the door rapidly, then paused uncertainly, leaning against the door-jamb and looking down the street.

"Will you go?" she murmured.

"I can't — not yet."

"You must — at once. Jeff Wray is coming here — now!"

"What have I to do with him?"

"Nothing — only if he guesses what you've been saying to me, I won't answer for him. That's all."

Bent looked up with a quick smile, and then sat on the nearest desk. "I suppose I ought to be frightened. What? Jeff is a kind of a 'bad man,' isn't he? But I can't go now, Camilla. Wouldn't be the sporting thing, you know. I think I'll stay. Do you mind if I smoke?"

She watched the approaching figure of Jeff for a moment irresolutely and then turned indoors. "Of course, I can't *make* you go," she said, "but I have always understood that when a woman expressed a wish to be alone, it was the custom of gentlemen ——"

"You made my going impossible," he said coolly. "Don't forget that. I'll go after a while, but I won't run. You've got something to tell Jeff Wray. I prefer to be here when you do it."

"I didn't say I'd tell him," she put in quickly. "I'm not going to tell him. Now will you go?"

"No."

He sat on a desk, swinging one long leg to and fro and looking out of the open door, at which the figure of Jeff presently appeared. The newcomer took off his hat and shuffled in uneasily, but his wide stare and a nod to Bent showed neither surprise nor ill-humor. Indeed, his expression gave every sign of unusual content. He spoke to Bent, then gazed dubiously toward the teacher's desk, where Camilla, apparently absorbed in her letter, looked

up with a fine air of abstraction, nodded, and then went on with her writing.

"Looks sort of coolish around here," said Jeff. "Hope I haven't butted into an Experience Meeting or anything." He laughed, but Bent only examined the ash of his cigarette and smiled. "I thought, Camilla," he went on, "maybe you'd like to take a ride——"

Miss Irwin looked up. She knew every modulation of Jeff's voice. His tone was quiet — as it had been yesterday — but in it was the same note of command — or was it triumph? She glanced at Cortland Bent.

"I'm not riding to-day," she said quietly.

"Not with Bent, either? That's funny. What will people think around here? We've sort of got used to the idea of seeing you two out together — kind of part of the afternoon scenery, so to speak. Nothing wrong, is there?"

Bent flushed with anger, and Camilla marveled at this new manifestation of Jeff's instinct. It almost seemed as though he knew what had happened between them as well as though she had told him. Jeff laughed softly and looked from one to the other with his mildest stare, as though delighted at the discovery.

Miss Irwin rose and put her letter in the drawer of the desk. "I wish you'd go — both of you," she said quietly. But Wray had made himself comfortable in a chair and showed no disposition to move.

"I thought you might like to ride out to the 'Lone Tree,'" he said. "You know Mr. Bent has leased it to me?"

"Yes, he told me."

"What else did he tell you?"

"Oh, I say, Wray," Bent broke in, "I don't see how that can be any affair of yours."

Jeff Wray wrapped his quirt around one knee and smiled indulgently. "Doesn't seem so, does it, Bent?" he said coolly. "But it really is. You see, Camilla — Miss Irwin — and I have been friends a long time — as a matter of fact, we're sort of engaged ——"

"Jeff!" gasped the girl. The calmness of his effrontery almost, if not quite, deprived her of speech. "Even if it were true, you must see that it can hardly interest ——"

"I thought that he might like to know. I haven't interfered much between you two, but I've been thinking about you some. I thought it might be just as well that Mr. Bent understood before he went away."

Camilla started up, stammered, began to speak, then sank in her chair again. Bent looked coolly from one to the other.

"There seems to be a slight difference of opinion," he said.

"Oh, we're engaged all right," Jeff went on. "That's why I thought I'd better tell you it wouldn't be any use for you to try to persuade Camilla — that is, Miss Irwin — to go to New York with you."

Jeff made this surprising statement with the same ease with which he might have dissuaded a client in an unprofitable deal. Miss Irwin became a shade paler, Bent a shade darker. Such intuition was rather too precise to be pleasant. Neither of them replied. Bent, because he feared to trust himself to speak — Camilla, because her tongue refused obedience.

"Oh, I'm a pretty good guesser. Camilla told you she wasn't going, didn't she? I thought so. You see, that wouldn't have done at all, because I'd have had to go all the way East to bring her back again. When we're married of course ——"

"Jeff!" The girl's voice, found at last, echoed so shrilly in the bare room that even Wray was startled into silence. He had not seemed aware of any indelicacy in his revelation, but each moment added to the bitterness of Miss Irwin's awakening. Bent's indignity had made her hate herself and despise the man who had offered it. She thought she saw what kind of wood had been hidden under his handsome veneer — she had always known what Jeff was made of. The fibre was there, tough, strong, and ugly as ever, but it was not rotten. And in that hour she learned a new definition of chivalry.

"Jeff, will you be quiet?" But she went over to him and put her hand on his shoulder, and her words came slowly and very distinctly, as she looked over Wray's head into Cortland Bent's eyes. "What Mr. Wray says is true. I intend to marry him when he asks me to."

"'I reckon that about winds up all your loose ends around Mesa,' said Jeff cheerfully."

Bent bowed his head, as Jeff rose, the girl's hand in his.

"I reckon that about winds up all your loose ends around Mesa, don't it, Bent?" said Jeff cheerfully. "When are you leaving town?"

But Bent by this time had taken up his cap, and was gone.

CHAPTER III

NEW YORK

WONDERFUL things happened in the year which followed. The "Lone Tree" was a bonanza. Every month added to the value of the discovery. The incredulous came, saw, and were conquered, and Mesa City was a "boom town" again. Jeff Wray hadn't a great deal to say in those days. His brain was working overtime upon the great interlocking scheme of financial enterprises which was to make him one of the richest men in the West. He spoke little, but his face wore a smile that never came off, and his baby-blue stare was more vacuous than ever.

And yet, as month followed month and the things happened which he had so long predicted for himself and for the town, something of his old arrogance slipped away from him. If balked ambition and injured pride had made him boast before, it was success that tamed him. There was no time to swagger. Weighty problems gave him an air of seriousness which lent him a dignity he had never possessed. And if sometimes he blustered now, people listened. There was a difference.

As the time for her wedding approached, for the first time in her life Camilla felt the personality of

the man. Why was it that she could not love him? Since that hour at the schoolhouse when Cortland Bent had shown her how near — and how fearful — could be the spiritual relation between a woman and a man, life had taken a different meaning to her.

Jeff's was a curious courtship. He made love to her bunglingly, and she realized that his diffidence was the expression of a kind of rustic humility which set her in a shrine at which he distantly worshipped. He seemed most like the Jeff of other days when he was talking of himself, and she allowed him to do this by the hour, listening, questioning, and encouraging. If this was to make the most of her life, perhaps it might be as well to get used to the idea. She could not deny that she was interested. Jeff's schemes seemed like a page out of a fairy book, and, whether she would or not, she went along with him. There seemed no limit to his invention, and there was little doubt in his mind, or, indeed, in hers, that the world was to be made to provide very generously for them both.

It was on the eve of their wedding day that Jeff first spoke of his childhood.

"I suppose you know, Camilla, I never had a father. That is," he corrected, "not one to brag about. My mother was a waitress in the Frontier Hotel at Fort Dodge. She died when I was born. That's my family tree. You knew it, I guess, but I thought maybe you'd like to change your mind."

He looked away from her. The words came slowly, and there was a note of heaviness in his

voice. She realized how hard it was for him to speak of these things, and put her hand confidently in his.

"Yes, I knew," she said softly. "But I never weighed *that* against you, Jeff. It only makes me prouder of what you have become." And then, after a pause, "Did you never hear anything about him?"

"There were some letters written before I was born. I'll show them to you some day. He was from New York, that's all I know. Maybe you can guess now why I didn't like Cort Bent."

Camilla withdrew her hands from his and buried her face in them, while Wray sat gloomily gazing at the opposite wall. In a moment she raised her head, her cheeks burning.

"Yes, I understand now," she muttered. "He was not worth bothering about."

* * * * *

And now they were at the hotel in New York, where Jeff had come on business. The Empire drawing room overlooked Fifth Avenue and the cross street. There was a reception room in the French style, a dining room in English oak, a library (Flemish), smoking room (Turkish), a hall (Dutch), and a number of bedrooms, each a reproduction of a celebrated historical apartment. The wall hangings were of silk, the curtains of heavy brocade, the pictures poor copies of excellent old masters, the rugs costly; and the fixtures in Camilla's bathroom were of solid silver.

Camilla stood before the cheval glass in her dressing room (Recamier) trying on, with the assistance of her maid and a modiste, a fetching hat and afternoon costume. Chairs, tables, and the bed in her own sleeping room were covered with miscellaneous finery.

When the women had gone, Camilla dropped into a chair in the drawing room. There was something about the made-to-order magnificence which oppressed her with its emptiness. Everything that money could buy was hers for the asking. Her husband was going to be fabulously wealthy — every month since they had been married had developed new possibilities. His foresight was extraordinary, and his luck had become a by-word in the West. Each of his new ventures had attracted a large following, and money had flowed into the coffers of the company. It was difficult for her to realize all that happened in the wonderful period since she had sat at her humble desk in the schoolhouse at Mesa City. She was not sure what it was that she lacked, for she and Jeff got along admirably, but the room in which she sat seemed to be one expression of it — a room to be possessed but not enjoyed. Their good fortune was so brief that it had no perspective. Life had no personality. It was made of Things, like the articles in this drawing room, each one agreeably harmonious with the other, but devoid of associations, pleasant or unpleasant. The only difference between this room and the parlor at Mrs. Bren-

nan's was that the furniture of the hotel had cost more money.

To tell the truth, Camilla was horribly bored. She had proposed to spend the mornings, when Jeff was downtown, in the agreeable task of providing herself with a suitable wardrobe. But she found that the time hung heavily on her hands. The wives of Jeff's business associates in New York had not yet called. Perhaps they never would call. Everything here spoke of wealth, and the entrance of a new millionaire upon the scene was not such a rare occurrence as to excite unusual comment. She peered out up the avenue at the endless tide of wealth and fashion which passed her by, and she felt very dreary and isolated, like a vacant house from which old tenants had departed and into which new ones would not enter.

She was in this mood when a servant entered. She had reached the point when even this interruption was welcome, but when she saw that the man bore a card tray her interest revived, and she took up the bit of pasteboard with a short sigh of relief. She looked at it, turned it over in her fingers, her blood slowing a little, then rushing hotly to her temples.

Cortland Bent! She let the card fall on the table beside her.

"Tell him that I am not ——" she paused and glanced out of the window. The quick impulse was gone. "Tell him — to come up," she finished.

When the page disappeared she glanced about

the room, then hurried to the door to recall him, but he had turned the corner into the corridor outside, and the message was on its way to a lower floor.

She paused, irresolute, then went in again, closing the outside door behind her. What had she done? A message of welcome to Cortland Bent, the one person in the world she had promised herself she should never see again; her husband's enemy, her own because he was her husband's; her own, too, because he had given her pride a wound from which it had not yet recovered! What should she do? She moved toward the door leading to her dressing room — to pause again.

What did it matter after all? Jeff wouldn't care. She laughed. Why should he? He could afford to be generous with the man who had lost the fortune he now possessed. He had, too, an implicit confidence in her own judgment, and never since they had been married had he questioned an action or motive of hers. As for herself — that was another matter. She tossed her head and looked at herself in her mirror. Should she not even welcome the opportunity to show Bent how small a place he now held in her memory? The mirror told her she was handsome, but she still lingered before it, arranging her hair, when her visitor was announced.

He stood with his hands behind his back studying the portrait over the fireplace, turning at the sound of her voice.

"It's very nice of you to see me," he said slowly. "How long have you been here?"

"A few weeks only. Won't you sit down?"

A warm color had come to her cheeks as she realized that he was carefully scrutinizing her from head to heel.

"Of course we're very much honored ——" she began.

"I can't tell you how glad I am to see you," he broke in warmly. "I was tempted to write you a dozen times, but your engagement and marriage to Wray and" — he paused — "the trouble about the mine seemed to make it difficult, somehow."

"I'm sure my husband bears you no ill-will."

He gave a short laugh. "There's no reason why he should. There's nothing for *him* to be upset about. He got the fortune that should — which might have been mine — to say nothing of the girl ——"

"Perhaps we had better leave the girl out of it," she put in calmly. "Even time hasn't explained *that* misunderstanding."

He shrugged a shoulder expressively. "As you please. I'll not parade any ghosts if I can help it. I'm too happy to see you. You're more wonderful than ever. Really I don't believe I should have known you. You're changed somehow. I wonder what it is?"

"Prosperity?" she suggested.

"I'm not sure I feel at home with you. You're so matured, so — so punctilious and modish."

"You wouldn't have me wear a short skirt and a sombrero?" she said with a slow smile.

"No, no. It is not what you wear so much as what you are. You are really the great lady. I think I knew it there in the West."

She glanced around the room.

"This?" she queried. "This was Jeff's idea." And then, as the possible disloyalty occurred to her, "You know I would much have preferred a quieter place. Fine feathers don't always make fine birds."

"But fine birds can be no less fine whatever they wear." There was a pause, and then he asked:

"How long will you be here?"

"All winter, I think. My husband has business in New York."

"Yes, I know. Mesa City can spare him best at this season."

Bent took up an ivory paper cutter from the table and sat turning it over in his fingers. "I hope — I really hope we may be friends, Mrs. Wray. I think perhaps if you'll let me I can be of service to you here. I don't think that there is a chance that I can forget your husband's getting the 'Lone Tree' away from me. It's pretty hard to have a success like that at the tips of one's fingers and not be able to grasp it. I've been pretty sick about it, and the governor threatened to disown me. But he seems to have taken a fancy to your husband. I believe that they have some business relations. The fifty thousand dollars we got in the final settle-

ment salved his wounds I think. Your husband has the law on his side and that's all there is to it. I'm glad he has it for your sake, though, especially as it has given me a chance to see you again."

"You're very generous," she said. "I'm sorry. It has worried me a great deal."

"Oh, well, let's say no more about it," he said more cheerfully. "I'm so glad that you're to be here. What do you think of my little burg? Does it amuse you at all? What? Have you met many people, or don't you want to meet them? I'd like you to know my family — my aunt, Mrs. Rumsen, especially. She's a bit of a grenadier, but I know you'll get along. She always says what she thinks, so you mustn't mind. She's quite the thing here. Makes out people's lists for them and all that kind of thing. Won't you come and dine with the governor some time?"

"Perhaps it will be time enough when we're asked ——"

"Oh — er — of course. I forgot. I'll ask Gladys — that's my sister — to call at once."

"Please don't trouble."

Try as she might to present an air of indifference, down in her heart she was secretly delighted at his candid, friendly attitude. No other could have so effectually salved the sudden searing wound he had once inflicted. To-day it was difficult to believe him capable of evil. He had tried to forget the past. Why should not she? There was another girl. Perhaps their engagement had been announced.

She knew she was treading on dangerous ground, but she ventured to ask him.

"Gretchen?" he replied. "Oh, Lord, no! Not yet. You see she has some ideas of her own on the subject, and it takes at least two to make a bargain. Miss Janney is a fine sport. Life is a good deal of a joke with her, as it is to me, but neither of us feels like carrying it as far as matrimony. We get on beautifully. She's frightfully rich. I suppose I'll be, too, some day. What's the use? It's a sheer waste of raw material. She has a romantic sort of an idea that she wants a poor man — the sort of chap she can lift out of a gray atmosphere. And I ——" His voice grew suddenly sober. "You won't believe that I, too, had the same kind of notion."

It was some moments before she understood what he meant, but the silence which followed was expressive. He did not choose that she should misunderstand.

"Yes," he added, "I mean you."

She laughed nervously. "You didn't ask me to marry you?"

"No. But I might have explained why I didn't if you had given me time. I don't think I realized what it meant to me to leave you until I learned that I had to. Perhaps it isn't too late to tell you now."

She was silent, and so he went on.

"I was engaged to be married. I have been since I was a boy. It was a family affair. Both of us

protested, but my father and hers had set their hearts on it. My governor swore he'd cut me off unless I did as he wished. And he's not a man to break his word. I was afraid of him. I was weak, Camilla. I'm not ashamed to tell you the truth. I knew unless I made good at the mine that I should have nothing to offer you. So I thought if I could get you to come East, stay for a while, and meet my father, that time might work out our salvation."

She got up hurriedly and walked to the window. "I can't see that you can do any good telling me this. It means so little," she stammered.

"Only to justify myself. I want to try and make it possible for you to understand how things were with me then — how they are now."

"No, no. It can do no good."

"Let me finish," he said calmly. "It was the other girl I was thinking about. I was still pledged to her. I could have written her for my release — but matters came to a crisis rather suddenly. And then you told me of your engagement to Mr. Wray. You see, after that I didn't care what happened." He paused, leaning with one hand on the table, his head bent. "Perhaps I ought not to speak to you in this way now. But it was on your own account. I don't know what I said to you. I only remember that I did not ask you to marry me, but that I wanted you with me always."

His voice sounded very far away to Camilla, like a message from another life she had lived so long ago that it seemed almost a message from the dead.

She did not know whether what she most felt was happiness or misery. The one thing she was sure of was that he had no right to be speaking to her in this way and that she had no right to be listening. But still she listened. His words sank almost to a whisper, but she heard. "I wanted you to be with me always. I knew afterward that I had never loved any woman but you—God help me — that I never could love any other woman ——" He stopped again. In her corner Camilla was crying softly — tears of pity for him, for the ashes of their dead.

"Don't, dear," he said gently. She thought he was coming forward and raised her head to protest, but she saw that he still stood by the table, his back toward her. She turned one look of mute appeal, which he did not see, in his direction, and then rose quickly.

"You must never speak in this way again," she said, with a surer note. "Never. I should not have listened. It is my fault. But I have been so — so glad to hear that — you didn't mean what you said. God knows I forgive you, and I only hope you can understand — how it was — with me. You had been so friendly — so clean. It wounded me — horribly. It made me lose my faith in all things, and I wanted to keep you — as a friend."

"I think I may still be a friend."

"I hope so ——" She emerged diffidently and laid her hand gently on his arm. "If you want to be my friend you must forget."

"I'll try. I *have* tried. That was easier this morning than it is this afternoon. It will be harder to-night — harder still to-morrow." He gave a short laugh and turned away from her toward the fireplace where he stood, watching the gray embers.

"Oh, people don't die of this sort of thing," he muttered.

It was almost with an air of unconcern that she began rearranging the Beauties on the table, speaking with such a genuine spirit of raillery that he turned to look at her.

"Oh, it isn't nearly as bad as you think it is. A man is never quite so madly in love that he can't forget. You've been dreaming. I was different from the sort of girls you were used to. You were in love with the mountains, and mistook me for background."

"No. There wasn't any background," he broke in. "There was never anything in the picture but you. I know. It's the same now."

"Sh — I must not let you speak to me so. If you do, I must go away from New York — or you must."

"You wouldn't care."

She could make no reply to that, and attempted none. When the flowers were arranged she sat on the edge of the table facing him. "Perhaps it would be the better way for me to go back to the West," she said, "but New York is surely big enough to hold us both without danger of your meeting me too often. And I have another idea," her smile

came slowly, with difficulty, "when you see enough of me in your own city, you will be glad to forget me whether you want to or not. Perhaps you may meet me among your own kind of people — your own kind of girls, at dinners, or at dances. You don't really know me very well, after all. Wouldn't it bother you if from sheer awkwardness I spilled my wine or said 'yes, ma'am,' or 'no, ma'am,' to my hostess, not because I wanted to, but because I was too frightened to think of anything else? Or mistook the butler for my host? Or stepped on somebody's toes in a ballroom. You know I don't dance very well. Suppose ——"

"Oh, what's the use, Camilla?" he broke in angrily. "You don't deceive anybody. You know that kind of thing wouldn't make any difference to me."

"But it might to other people. You wouldn't fancy seeing me ridiculous." He turned to the fire again, and she perceived that her warning hadn't merited the dignity of a reply, but her attitude and the lighter key in which her tone was pitched had saved the situation. When he spoke again, all trace of his discomposure had vanished.

"Oh, I suppose I'll survive. I've got a name for nerve of a certain kind, and nobody shall say I ran away from a woman. I don't suppose there's any use of my trying to like your husband. You see, I'm frank with you. But I'll swallow a good deal to be able to be near you."

There was a silence during which she keenly searched his face.

"You mustn't dislike Jeff. I can't permit that. You can't blame him for being lucky ——"

"Lucky? Yes, I suppose you might call it luck. Didn't you know how your husband and Mulrennan got that mine?"

She rose, her eyes full of a new wonder and curiosity.

"They leased it. Everything was legally done," she said.

"Oh, yes. Legally ——" he paused.

"Go on — go on."

"What is the use?"

"I must know — everything."

"He never told you? I think I know why. Because your code and his are different. The consciences of some men are satisfied if they keep their affairs within the letter of the law. But there's a moral law which has nothing to do with the courts. He didn't tell you because he knew you obeyed a different precept."

"What did he do? Won't you tell me?"

CHAPTER IV

THE FORBIDDEN WAY

HE CAME forward and stood facing her, one hand clutching the back of a chair, his eyes blazing with newly kindled resentment. "Yes, I will tell you. It's right for you to know. There was a man in my employ who had a fancied grievance against my foreman. He had no just cause for complaint. I found that out and told Harbison to fire him. If Harbison had obeyed orders there would have been a different story to tell about the 'Lone Tree.' But my foreman took pity on him because he had a family; then tried to get him started right again. The man used to work extra time at night, sometimes with a shift and sometimes alone. And one night in the small gallery at the hundred-foot level he found the vein we had been looking for. He was a German, Max Reimer, by name ——"

"Max Reimer," she repeated mechanically.

"Alone there in that cavern he thought out the plan which afterward resulted in putting me out of business. He quickly got some timbers together and hid the hole he'd made. This was easy, for the steps and railing of the winze needed supports and planking. He put in a blast farther over and

hid the gold-bearing rock — all but a few of the pieces. These he took out in the pockets of his overalls and carried them to Jeff Wray ——"

"Jeff ——"

"Your husband called in Pete Mulrennan, and they talked it over. Then one night Pete and Max crept up to the mine, got past the watchman, and Max showed Pete what he'd found. I learned all this from Harbison after they let Max loose."

"Let him loose? What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you. Max wanted a lump sum in cash. They laughed at him — chiefly because they didn't have the money to pay. Then he wanted a percentage bigger than they wanted to give. When they temporized he got ugly, swore he'd rather run his chances with Harbison and me, but he never had an opportunity ——"

"You don't mean ——?" she gasped.

"Wray and Mulrennan lured Reimer to a room over the saloon and got up a fight; they put him out, gagged and trussed him like a fowl, and left him there until Jeff Wray had closed the deal with me. That's how your husband got my mine."

"It can't be," she stammered. "Yes — yes. And Reimer?"

"They hid him for two weeks, until they brought him to terms."

"I remember," she said, passing her hand over her brow. "Reimer's boy was in my school. They missed old Max. They thought he had deserted them. What a horrible thing! And Jeff — my husband ——"

"That is what people call Jeff Wray's luck," he said, and then added grimly, "and my misfortune."

"But the law?" she said. "Was there no way in which you could prove the — the ——"

"The fraud?" he said brutally. "Oh, yes. The Law! Do you know who impersonates the Law in Mesa City? Pete Mulrennan! He's judge, court, and jury. We had the best lawyer in Denver. But Lawrence Berkely had done his work too well. There's a suit still pending, but we haven't a show. Good God, Camilla! do you mean to say you heard nothing of all this?"

"Nothing," she said. "Nothing. When I heard of the suit and questioned Jeff he — he said it was maliciousness, jealousy, disappointment, and I believed him."

He turned away from her and paced the floor. "He was right. It was all of these. But there was something else ——"

"Oh, I know," she broke in. "It was what I am feeling now — the sense of a wrong. But you forget ——" She got up and faced him, groping vaguely for an extenuating circumstance. "That sort of thing has been done in the West before. A successful mine is all a matter of luck. Max Reimer's find might have only been a pocket. In that case you would have been the gainer, and Jeff would have lost."

"That's sophistry. I can't blame you for defending your husband. Mines have been leased

and bought on theory — with a chance to win, a chance to lose — for the mere love of a gamble. There was no gamble here. The gold ore was there — one had only to look. There never has been anything like it since Cripple Creek. It was mine. Jeff Wray wanted it — so he took it — by force."

She had sunk on the settee between the windows, her face buried in her hands, and was trying to think. All this, the hired magnificence, the empty show, the damask she was sitting on, the rings on her hands, her clothing even, belonged by every law of decency and morality to the man who stood there before her. And the wrong she had so long cherished in her heart against him was as nothing to the injury her husband had done to him. She knew nothing of the law, cared nothing for it. All she could think of were the facts of the case as he had presented them. Cortland told the truth, she recognized it in everything he had said, in the ringing note of his voice, the clear light of his eye, the resentment of a nature that had been tried too far. A hundred forgotten incidents were now remembered — Jeff's reticence about the law-suit, Max Reimer's disappearance, the many secret conferences with Mulrennan. She wondered that suspicion of Jeff had never entered her mind before. She realized now more poignantly than ever that she had been moving blindly, supinely, under the spell of a personality stronger than her own. She recalled the scene in the cañon when, beside herself with shame and

mortification, she had struck him in the face and he had only laughed at her, as he would have laughed at a rebellious child. In that moment she had hated him. The tolerance that had come later had been defensive — a defense of her pride. When Cortland Bent had left, she had flown like a wounded swallow to the hawk's nest, glad of any refuge from the ache at her heart.

She raised her head and sought Bent's eyes with her own. A while ago it had seemed so easy to speak to him. He had been so gentle with her, and his reticence had made her own indifference possible. He had gone back to the dead fire again as though to find there a phenix of his lost hope, and was leaning with an elbow on the mantel, his head bowed in subjection. He had put his fetters on again as though to make her understand that his sharp indictment of her husband had not been intended to include the woman he loved. Painfully she rose and took a step toward him, and, when she spoke, her voice was low and constrained, for her thoughts came with difficulty.

"You are right. There *is* a moral code — a law of conscience. In my heart I know that no matter what other men have done in the West in their madness for gold, the fever for wealth, nothing the law holds will make Jeff's responsibility to you any the less in my sight. I — I did not know. You believe me, don't you? I did not know. Even if I had known, perhaps it would not have made any difference. But I am sure of one thing — I could

never have married a man to live on what he had stolen from another." As he turned toward her she put her hands over her face. "Oh, I am shamed — shamed. Perhaps I could have done something; I would have tried. You know that I would have tried — don't you?"

"Yes, yes, I know. I would not have told, I would not have made you unhappy — but it maddens me to see you here with what is mine — his wife." He took her hands down and made her look in his face. "Don't think harshly of me. It isn't the money. If you could have had it — if you didn't have to share it with him — can't you understand?"

But she would not look at him, and only murmured, "I understand — I understand many things I did not know before. But the one thing that seems most important is that I am his wife. Whatever he has done to others, he has been very good, very gentle and kind to me."

He dropped her hands and turned violently away. "How could you?" he groaned. "How could you have married him?"

"God knows!"

The words were wrung from her quickly, like the sudden dropping of a burden which shocked by the noise of its impact before she was conscious of its loss. She turned in the same moment and looked at him, hoping that he had not heard her. But before she could prevent him he had caught her in his arms and held her close to his body, so that,

struggle as she might, there was no chance for her to escape. And in his eyes she saw the gleam of an old delight, a bright, wild spark among the embers of bitterness.

"Camilla!" he whispered. "I know now. God forgive me that I did not know before — out there in the schoolhouse, when you gave yourself to him. You loved me then — you love me now. Isn't that why you tremble, Camilla? You need not speak. Your heart is close to mine and I can read ——"

"No, no, no," she murmured. "It is not true. You must not. I did not mean — what I said, you misunderstood ——"

"Once I misunderstood. I won't make the same mistake again. It was I who found you there, parching in the desert, and taught you how to grow — who showed you that life was something more than the barren waste you had found it. Won't you forgive me? I was a fool — and worse. Look up at me, Camilla, dear. You were mine out there before you were his. At least a half of what Jeff Wray has stolen from me — your spiritual side ——"

At the sound of her husband's name she raised her head and looked up at him in a daze. He caught her again madly, and his lips even brushed her cheek, but she started from his arms and sped the length of the room away from him.

"Camilla!"

"No, no. You must not." She stood facing

him, wildly pleading. "Don't come near me, Cort. Is this the way you are going to try to forget — the way you will teach me to forget?"

"I didn't know then — I want you, Camilla ——"

As he came forward she retreated to the door of the library and put her hand on the knob. She did not hear the soft patter of feet on the other side.

"Then I must go," she said decisively.

He stopped, looked at her blankly, then turned away.

"I suppose you're right," he said quietly. "Forgive me. I had almost forgotten."

He slowly paced the room away from her and, his head in his hands, sank in a distant chair. He heard her sharp sigh and the sound of her footsteps as she gathered courage and came forward. But he did not move, and listened with the dull ears of a broken man from whom all hope has departed.

"It is going to be harder than I thought. I hoped at least that I could keep what was in my heart a secret. When my secret was my own it did not seem as if I was doing any injustice to — to Jeff. It was my heart that was breaking — not his. What did my secrets matter as long as I did my duty? But now that you share the burden I know that I am doing him a great wrong — a greater wrong even than he has done to you. I can't blame you for coming here. It is hard to forgive a wrong like that. But with me it is different. No matter what Jeff has done, what he may do,

my duty is very clear — my duty to him, and even to you. I don't know just how — I must have time to think it out for myself. One thing is certain: I must not see you again."

He waved a hand in deprecation. "That is so easy to say. You shall see me again," he threatened. "I will not give you up."

"You must! I will find some excuse to leave New York."

"I'll follow you," doggedly. "You're mine."

She paused in dismay. Were all the odds to be against her? A sudden terror gripped her heart and left her supine. She summoned her strength with an effort.

"Cort!" she cried desperately. "You must not speak to me like that. I will not listen. You don't know what you are saying."

"I don't care what I'm saying — you have driven me mad." As he rose, she retreated, still facing him, her lips pale, her eyes bright, her face drawn but resolved.

"And I," she said clearly, "I am sane again. If you follow — I will ring. Do you hear?"

Her hand sought the wall, then was arrested in mid air. A sound of voices, the ringing of a bell, and the soft patter of a servant's steps in the corridor brought Cortland Bent to his senses.

"It's Jeff," she whispered breathlessly; and then with a quiet air of self-command, the dignity of a well-bred hostess, "Will you sit down, Mr. Bent? I will ring for tea."

In the shadowed doorway a tall figure stood.

"Why, Jeff," said Camilla coolly, "you're early, aren't you? I thought ——"

She rose as she realized that the gentleman in the doorway wore a frock coat — a garment Jeff affected to despise — and that the hair at his temples was white. "I beg your pardon," she murmured.

The gentleman smiled and came forward into the room with outstretched hand.

"I am General Bent. Is this Mrs. Wray? Your husband is coming along."

Jeff entered from the corridor at this moment. "Hello, Camilla! The General was kind enough to say he wanted to meet you, so he brought me uptown in his machine."

The eyes of both newcomers fell on Cortland Bent, who emerged from the shadow.

"Why, Cort! You here?" said the General, and if his quick tones showed slight annoyance, his well-bred accents meant only polite inquiry.

"Yes, dad. How do you do, Mr. Wray?"

Wray went over and took him by the hand.

"Well! well!" said Wray heartily. "This is sure like old times. Glad to see you, Bent. It seems like only yesterday that you and Camilla were galloping over the plains together. A year and a half has made some changes, eh? Camilla, can't we have a drink? One doesn't meet old friends every day."

"I rang for tea."

"Tea? Ugh! Not tea, Camilla. I can't get

used to these foreign notions. General — Cort — some Scotch? That's better. Tea was invented for sick people and old maids," and then, as the servant entered, "Tell Greer to bring the tray, and some cigars. You'll let us, won't you, Camilla? General Bent and I have been talking for two hours, and if there's any thirstier business than that ——"

"I hope we aren't intruding," said the General. "I have been very anxious to meet you, Mrs. Wray."

"I'm very much flattered. I'm afraid, though, that Jeff has taken you out of your way." She paused, conscious that the sharp eyes of the old man were peering at her curiously from under the shadows of his bushy eyebrows. "I feel as if I ought to know you very well," she went on. "In the West your son often spoke of you."

"Did he? H — m!" And then, with a laugh, "Cortland, my boy, what did you say to her? You expected to see an old ogre, didn't you?"

"Oh, no, but you are different from the idea I had of you. You and your son are not in the least alike, are you?"

"No. You see Cortland took the comeliness of the Davidges, and I — well, I won't tell you what they call me in the Street," he laughed grimly. "You know Mr. Wray and I have some interests in the West in common — some properties that adjoin, and some railroads that join. It's absurdly simple. *He* wants what *I* have, and *I* want what

he has, and neither of us is willing to give up a square inch. Won't you tell us what to do?"

"I give it up," she laughed. "My husband has a way of getting what he wants."

"The great secret of that," said Wray comfortably, "is wanting what you can get. Still, I don't doubt that when the General's crowd gets through with me there won't be enough of me to want anything. You needn't worry about the 'Lone Tree,' Cortland. You'll have it again, after a while, when my hide is spread out to dry."

General Bent's eyes vanished under his heavy brows.

"No," he said cryptically. "It looks as though the fruit of the 'Lone Tree' was forbidden."

CHAPTER V

DINERS OUT

WHEN the visitors had gone, Camilla disappeared in the direction of her own apartment. The thought of being alone with Jeff was intolerable to her. She must have time to think, to wash away the traces of her emotion, which she was sure even the shadows of the drawing room could hardly have hidden from the sharp eyes of her elderly guest. Her husband had given no indication of having noticed anything unusual in her appearance, but she knew that he would not have let her discover it if he had. She breathed a sigh of relief when the door was closed behind her, dismissed her maid, and, slipping into a comfortable garment, threw herself face downward on a couch and buried her head in its pillow.

Out of the disordered tangle of her thoughts one idea gradually evolved — that she must not see Cortland Bent again. She could not plan just now how she was to avoid him, for General Bent had already invited them to dine at his house, and she knew that she must go, for Jeff's sake, no matter what it cost her. She could not blame Cortland as much as she blamed herself, for she realized now how vulnerable she had been even from the

first moment when she had entered the room, bravely assuring herself that she cared for him no longer. The revelation of her husband's part in the lease of the "Lone Tree" had shocked her, but even her abomination of his brutal method of consummating the business was lost in the discovery of her own culpability. Before to-day it had not seemed so great a sin to hold another man's image in her heart, but the disclosure of her secret had robbed it of some of the dignity of seclusion. The one thing that had redeemed her in the past had been the soft pains of self-abnegation, and now she had not even those to comfort her.

The revelation to Cort had even made their relation a little brutal. She fought with herself silently, proposing subterfuge and sophistry, then dragging her pitiful treasure forth remorselessly under the garish light of conscience. She could not understand the change that Cortland's presence made; for what yesterday had been only unduteous, to-day was a sin. What then had been a balm was now a poison.

Morning brought regeneration. The sun shone brightly through her yellow curtains, and her maid brought with her breakfast tray a note from the contrite Cortland.

"Forgive me, Camilla. Forgive me. Call me selfish, unreasonable, cruel — anything you like — but don't tell me I shall not see you again. You will find me a model of all the virtues. Gladys

is calling on you to-day. You are coming to the dinner, aren't you? I will be there — in a corner somewhere, but I won't bother you. The night has brought me patience. Forgive me.

"C."

Camilla slipped the note among her laces, and when Jeff looked in to bring her the invitation which had arrived in the morning mail to dine at the house of Cornelius Bent, she presented a fair face and joyous countenance.

General Bent's dinners had a way of being ponderous — like himself. From soup to coffee the victuals were rich and highly seasoned, the wines full-bodied; his dishes were heavy, his silver-service massive, his furniture capacious. The impression of solidity was further enhanced by the thick oak paneling, the wide fireplace, and the sumptuous candelabra. Many, if not all, of these adjectives might readily be applied to his men-servants, who had been so long in his employ that the essentials of their surroundings had been seared into their souls. The Bent régime was their religion, the General its high priest, and their offices components of a ceremony which they observed with impressive dignity and sedate fervor.

As a rule, the personality of the General's guests did nothing to detract from the impression of opulence. They were the heavy men of affairs, the big men of clubdom, of business, of religion, of politics. Camilla had been warned of what

she must expect, but it was with feelings of trepidation not far removed from awe that she and Jeff got down from their taxi under the glow of the porte-cochère before the wide portal of the great house in Madison Avenue. Her last admonition to her husband in the cab had been, "Jeff, don't shuffle your feet! And don't say 'ma'am.' And keep your hands out of your pockets! If you can't think of anything to say, don't say it."

Wray only laughed. He was very much at his ease, for he had convinced himself downtown that the doors of the Bent establishment would not have swung so wide had the General not found that Wray's holdings and influence in the West were matters which some day he would have to reckon with.

When they arrived they were pleased to discover that there were to be young people among the guests as well as old. Three stout, florid gentlemen, members of the directorate of the Amalgamated Reduction Company, whom Jeff had met downtown, with their wives, and Mr. and Mrs. Worthington Rumsen lent their share to the dignity the General required, but there was a leaven of a younger set in Gladys, his daughter (Mrs. Bent had died many years before), Cortland, his son, and some others. Most of the guests were already in the drawing room when the Wrays were announced. And Camilla entered a little uncertainly, her eyes sparkling, seeking her hostess. There was a subdued masculine murmur of approval, a raising of lorgnons

to aged feminine noses, a general movement of appreciation.

Camilla was radiant. Cortland Bent came forward from his corner, slowly drinking in her loveliness with his eyes. She was gowned in white and wore no ornaments. The slenderness which all women ape was hers without asking. Her ruddy hair at the last moment had resisted the arts of the hair-dresser, and so she wore it as she had always done, in a heavy coil like a rope of flame. If she had been pale as she entered, the blood now flowed quickly — almost too quickly to be fashionable — suffusing her face and gently warming her splendid throat and shoulders.

"Am I late?" she asked. "I'm so sorry. Will you forgive me?"

"You're not late," said her hostess. "Awfully glad ——"

"We're bountifully repaid," put in General Bent gallantly, as he came forward. "I'm sure you're quite worth waiting for. I've been telling New York for years it had better keep its eyes on the West. Now I must warn its women. How are you, Wray? You know Warrington — and Janney. Let me present you, Wray — the Baroness Charny."

Jeff felt himself appraised civilly.

"You are *the* Mr. Wray?" she asked him. "The rich Mr. Wray?"

Jeff flushed with pleasure. Nothing ever tickled him more than a reference to his possessions.

"I'm Wray — from Colorado. And you — you know I've never seen a real live baroness before. So don't mind if I look at you a little. You see, we never have anybody like you out our way ——"

"I don't mind in the least," she said with a slight accent. "What did you think a baroness ought to look like?"

"I had a kind of an idea she was stoutish, wore a crown, and sat in a big chair all day, ordering people around."

"I'm afraid you read fairy stories. I don't own a crown, and I might order people all day, but nobody would pay the least attention to me."

"What a pity," he said soberly.

His ingenuousness was refreshing.

"You know, Mr. Wray, baronesses aren't any more important nowadays than anybody else. The only barons worth while in the world are the Coal Barons, the Wheat Barons, the Gold Barons, like you." And then, "Did you know that you were to take me in? Are you glad?"

"Of course," with a vague attempt at gallantry. "I'd take you anywhere and be proud to."

"Then give me your arm," she laughed. And they followed the others in to dinner. Wray's other neighbor was Mrs. Rumsen, his host's sister. Camilla had related many tales of her social prowess, and she was really the only person at the table of whom Jeff stood the least in awe. Mrs. Rumsen's nose was aquiline like her brother's, her eyebrows high and slightly arched, her eyes small and rather

close together, as though nature had intended them for a short but concentrated vision. She held her head very erect, and from her great height was enabled without pretence to look down on all lesser things. Cortland had described her as a grenadier, and, as Wray realized that the moment when he must talk to her was inevitably approaching, he lost some faith in his moods and tenses.

"Mr. Wray," she began, in a tone which was clearly to be heard the length of the table, "you have a handsome wife."

"Yes, ma'am," he drawled. "I'm glad you think so, Mrs. Rumsen."

"A woman with her looks and your money could have the world at her feet if she wished."

"Yes. I've told her the same thing. But I don't think she likes a fuss. Why, I sent up a whole carload of hats — all colors, with plumes and things, but she wouldn't have one of them."

The old lady's deep wrinkles relaxed.

"And diamonds ——" he went on. "She's got half a peck, but I can't get her to put them on."

Mrs. Rumsen did not reply, only examined him with her small eyes through her lorgnon.

"You know, Mr. Wray, ever since you came into the room you have been a puzzle to me. Your features resemble those of some one I have known — years ago — some one I have known intimately — curious I can't ——"

"Have you ever been West?"

"Oh, yes. Were your people——?"

"I have no people, Mrs. Rumsen," he said with a quick air of finality.

"Oh!" She still looked at him wonderingly. "I beg your pardon." Then she went on calmly, "You really interest me a great deal. I have seen Westerners in New York before — but you're different — I mean," she added, "the cut of your nose, the lines of your chin, the set of your head on your shoulders. I hope you'll forgive an old woman's curiosity."

Jeff bowed politely. "I'm very much flattered, Mrs. Rumsen."

"You and my brother have business interests in common?"

"Yes, I've a mine — a chain of mines and property interests, including a control of the Denver and Western Railroad."

She laid a hand impressively on his arm.

"Hold them. Take my advice and hold them. I know it is a great temptation to extend your control, to be a big man East and West. But don't try it by weakening what you have. Other men have come here to set the Hudson afire——"

"Some of them have done it, too, Mrs. Rumsen."

She shrugged. "What is the use? You have an empire of your own. Stay at home, develop it. Wouldn't you rather be first in Mantua than second in Rome?"

"I — I'm afraid I don't just take you?"

"I mean, wouldn't you rather be an emperor among your own people than fetch and carry — as so many others are doing — for Wall Street?"

"That's just the point. Only the boot is on the other leg. Wall Street needs the West. Wall Street doesn't think so. It's away behind the times. Those people downtown are so stuck on themselves that they think the whole country is stooping with its ear to the ground listening to what they're doing. Why, Mrs. Rumsen, there are men in the West — big men, too — who think Wall Street is a joke. Funny, isn't it? Wall Street doesn't seem to know that millions of acres of corn, of wheat, and potatoes keep growing just the same. Those things don't wait to hear what Wall Street thinks. Only God Almighty can make 'em stop growing. And as long as they grow, we don't bother much."

She smiled approvingly.

"Then why do you care?"

"Oh, I'm a kind of missionary. These people downtown are heathen critters. They're so ignorant about their own country it almost makes me ashamed to talk to them."

The last vestige of the grenadier aspect in Mrs. Rumsen had vanished, and her face dissolved in smiles.

"Heathens! They are," she laughed delightedly. "Critters — yes, critters, too. Splendid! Have you told Cornelius — my brother — that?"

Wray's truffle stuck in his throat and he gasped,

"Good God, ma'am! No. You won't tell him, will you?"

"I'd like to," she chuckled. "But I won't."

Jeff laughed. "I'm afraid I've put my foot in it. I'm apt to. I'm rather a raw product——"

"Whatever you do, Mr. Wray, don't change. You're positively refreshing. Anybody can learn to be good form. It's as simple as a, b, c. If it wasn't easy there wouldn't be so many people practising it. The people in the shops even adopt our adjectives before they're well out of our mouths. Hats are 'smart,' when in earlier days they were simply 'becoming.' Gowns are 'fetching' or 'stunning' that were once merely 'pretty.' Let a fashionable Englishman wear a short coat with a high hat to the Horse Show, and every popinjay in town will be doing the same thing in a week. If you're a raw product, remain so by all means. Raw products are so much more appetizing than half-baked ones."

"I don't think there's any way to make me any different, Mrs. Rumsen," he laughed, "even if I wanted to be. People will have to take me as I am. Your brother has been kind. It seems as if he had a broader view of our people than most of the others."

"Don't be too sure. They're all tarred with the same stick. It's a maxim of mine never to put my trust in any person or thing below Twenty-third Street. The farther downtown you go, the deeper the villainy. You'll find all New Yorkers

much the same. Out of business hours they are persons of the most exemplary habits, good fathers, vestrymen in churches, excellent hosts. In business ——" she held up her hands in mock horror.

"Oh, I know," Wray chuckled. "But I'm not afraid. I'm something of a wolf myself. Your brother needs me more than I need him. I think we'll get along."

"You have everything you want. Take my advice and keep your money in the West."

"Thanks. But I like New York, and I don't want to be idle. Besides, there's Camilla — Mrs. Wray, you know."

"Yes, I see. I can't blame her. No woman with her looks wants to waste them on mountain scenery. I must know her better — and you. She must let me call on her. I'm giving a ball later. Do you think you could come?"

And the great lady turned to her dinner partner.

The Baroness, too, was amiable. It was her first visit to America. Her husband was an attaché of an embassy in Washington. She had not yet been in the West. Were all the men big, as Mr. Wray was?

She had a charming faculty of injecting the personal note into her questions, and before he was aware of it Wray found himself well launched in a description of his country — the mountains, the plains, the cowboys.

She had never heard of cowboys. What were they? Little cows?

Jeff caught a warning look from Camilla across the table, which softened his laughter. He explained, and the Baroness joined in the merriment. Then he told her that he had been for years a cowpuncher down in Arizona and New Mexico before he went into business, described the "round-up," the grub wagon, and told her of a brush with some Yaqui Indians who were on the warpath. When he began, the other people stopped talking and listened. Jeff was in his element and without embarrassment finished his story amid plaudits. Camilla, listening timidly, was forced to admit that his domination of the table was complete. The conversation became general, a thing which rarely happened at the Bent dinners, and Jeff discovered himself the centre of attention. Almost unconsciously he found himself addressing most of his remarks to a lady opposite, who had listened and questioned with an unusual show of interest.

When the ices were passed he turned to Mrs. Rumsen and questioned.

"Haven't you met her?" And then, across the table, "Rita — you haven't met Mr. Wray — Mrs. Cheyne."

CHAPTER VI

MRS. CHEYNE

OVER the coffee, curiously enough, there seemed to be a disposition to refrain from market quotations, for General Bent skilfully directed the conversation into other channels — motoring — aviation — the Horse Show — the newest pictures in the Metropolitan — and Jeff listened avidly, newly alive to the interests of these people, who, as Mrs. Rumsen had said, above Twenty-third Street took on a personality which was not to be confounded with the life downtown, where he had first met them. When Curtis Janney asked him if he rode, Jeff only laughed.

"Oh, yes, of course you do. One doesn't punch cattle for nothing. But jumping is different — and then there's the saddle ——"

"Oh, I think I can stay on without going for the leather. Anyway, I'd like to try."

"Right-o !" said Janney heartily. "We've had one run already — a drag. Couldn't you and Mrs. Wray come out soon? We're having a few people for the hunt week after next. There will be Cortland Bent, Jack Perot, the Rumsens, the Billy Havilands, Mrs. Cheyne, the Baroness and — if you'll come along — yourselves."

"Delighted. I'm sure Camilla will be glad to accept. We haven't many engagements."

"I think you've hidden your wife long enough, Mr. Wray. Does she ride, too?"

"Like a breeze — astride. But she wouldn't know what to do on a side-saddle."

"I don't blame her. Some of our women ride across. Gladys, Gretchen, Mrs. Cheyne ——"

"Well," Jeff silently raised his brandy glass in imitation of his companion, "I'm glad there are a few horses somewhere around here — I haven't seen any outside of the shafts of a hansom since I left the West."

"The horse would soon be extinct if it wasn't for Curtis Janney," put in the General breezily. "Why, he won't even own a motor. No snorting devils for him. Might give his horses the pip or something. The stable is worth seeing, though. You're going, aren't you, Wray?"

In the library, later, Wray found Mrs. Cheyne. Until he had come to New York Wray's idea of a woman had never strayed from Camilla. There were other females in the Valley, and he had known some of them, but Camilla had made any comparison unfortunate. She was a being living in a sphere apart, with which mere clay had nothing in common. He had always thought of her as he thought of the rare plants in Jim Noakes' conservatory in Denver, flowers to be carefully nurtured and admired. Even marriage had made little difference in his point of view. It is curious that he

thought of these things when he leaned over Mrs. Cheyne. To his casual eye this new acquaintance possessed many of the characteristics of his wife. Perhaps even more than Camilla she represented a mental life of which he knew nothing, contributed more than her share to the sublimated atmosphere in which he found himself moving. They might have been grown in the same conservatory, but, if Camilla was the Orchid, Mrs. Cheyne was the Poinsettia flower. And yet she was not beautiful as Camilla was. Her features, taken one at a time, were singularly imperfect. He was almost ready to admit that she wasn't even strikingly pretty. But as he looked at her he realized for the first time in his life the curious fact that a woman need not be beautiful to be attractive. He saw that she was colorful and unusually shapely, and that she gave forth a flow of magnetism which her air of *ennui* made every effort to deny. Her eyes, like her hair, were brown, but the pupils, when she lifted her lids high enough to show them, were so large that they seemed much darker. Her dinner dress, cut straight across her shoulders, was of black, like the jewelled bandeau in her hair and the pearls which depended from her ears. These ornaments, together with the peculiar dressing of her hair, gave her well-formed head an effect which, if done in brighter hues, might have been barbaric, but which, in the subdued tones of her color scheme, only added to the impression of sombre distinction.

As he approached, she looked up at him sleepily.

"I thought you were never coming," she said.

"Did you?" said Wray, bewildered. "I — I came as soon as I could, Mrs. Cheyne. We had our cigars ——"

"Oh, I know. Men have always been selfish — they always will be selfish. Cousin Cornelius is provincial to herd the men and women — like sheep — the ones in one pen, the others in another. There isn't a salon in Europe — a real salon — where the women may not smoke if they like."

"You want to smoke ——"

"I'm famished — but the General doesn't approve ——"

Wray had taken out his cigarette case. "Couldn't we find a spot?"

She rose and led the way through a short corridor to the conservatory, where they found a stone bench under a palm.

He offered her his case, and she lit the cigarette daintily, holding it by the very tips of her fingers, and steadying her hand against his own as Wray would have done with a man's. Wray did not speak. He watched her amusedly, aware of the extraordinary interest with which she invested his pet vice.

"Thanks," she said gratefully. Turning toward him then, she lowered her chin, opened her eyes, and looked straight into his.

"You know, you didn't come to me nearly as soon as I thought you would."

"I — I didn't know ——"

"You should have known."

"Why should I ——?"

"Because I wanted you to."

"I'm glad you wanted me. I think I'd have come anyway."

She smiled approvingly.

"Then my efforts were unnecessary."

"Your efforts?"

"Yes, I willed it. You interested me, you see."

He looked at her quickly. Her eyes only closed sleepily, then opened again.

"I'm lucky," he said, "that's sure."

"How do you know? I may not be at all the kind of person you think I am."

"I'll take a chance on that — but I wish you'd tell me what made you want me."

"I was bored. I usually am. The Bent parties are so formal and tiresome. Everybody always says the same things — does the same things." She sighed deeply. "If Cousin Cornelius saw me now I'd be in disgrace. I wonder why I always like to do the things people don't expect me to."

"You wouldn't be much of a woman if you didn't," he laughed. "But I like surprises. There wouldn't be much in life if you knew what was going to happen every minute."

"You didn't think I was going to happen then?"

"Er — no. Maybe I hoped so."

"Well," she smiled, "I *have* happened. What are you going to do about it?"

"Be thankful — mostly. You seem sort of human, somehow. You do what you want to — say what you want ——"

"And if I don't get what I want, ask for it," she laughed. "I told Gladys it was very inconsiderate of her not to send you in to dinner with me. She's always doing that sort of thing. Gladys lacks a sense of proportion. As it is, the evening is almost gone, and we've only begun."

"I feel as if I'd known you for years," said Jeff heartily. "That's funny, too," he added, "because you're so different from any other woman I've ever known. You look as if you might have come from a book — but you speak out like Mesa City."

"Tell me about Mesa City. You know I was out West last year."

"Were you? Sure?" eagerly. "In Colorado?"

"Oh, yes," she said slowly, "but I was living in Nevada."

"Nevada? That was my old stamping ground. I punched for the Bar Circle down there. What part?"

"Reno."

"Oh!"

"I went there for my divorce."

His voice fell a note. "I didn't know that. I'm awfully sorry you were so unfortunate. Won't you tell me about it?"

"There's nothing to tell. Cheyne and I were incompatible — at least that's what the lawyers said. As such things go, I thought we got along

beautifully. We weren't in the least incompatible so long as Cheyne went his way and let me go mine. It's so easy for married people to manage, if they only knew how. But Cheyne didn't. He didn't want to be with me himself — and he didn't want any one else to be. So things came to a pretty pass. It actually got so bad that when people wanted either of us to dinner they had to write first to inquire which of us was to stay away. It made a lot of trouble, and the Cheyne family got to be a bore — so we decided to break it up."

"Was he unkind to you — cruel?"

"Oh, dear, no! I wish he had been. Our life was one dreadful round of cheerful monotony. I got so tired of the shape of his ears that I could have screamed. Yes, I really think," she mused, "that it was his ears."

Wray examined her with his baby-like stare as though she had been a specimen of ore. There seemed to be no doubt of the fact that she was quite serious.

"I'm really sorry for him. It is — very sad ——"

She threw her head back and laughed softly.

"My dear Mr. Wray, your sympathy is touching — he would appreciate it as much as I do — if he had not already married again."

"Married? Here in New York?"

"Oh, yes. They're living within a stone's throw of my house."

"Do you see him?"

"Of course. I dined with them only last week.

You see," and she leaned toward him with an air of new confidences, "that's only human. I can't really give up anything I've once possessed. You know, I try not to sell horses that I've liked. I did sell one once, and he turned up one morning in a hired brougham. That taught me a lesson I've never forgotten. Now when they outlive their usefulness I turn them out on my farm in Westchester. Of course, I couldn't do that to Harold, but I did the next best thing. I've satisfied myself that he's properly looked after — and I'm sure he'll reflect credit on his early training."

"And he's happy?"

"Blissfully so. It wouldn't be possible for a man to have the advantages of a training like the one I have given him and not be able to make a woman happy."

"But he didn't make *you* happy."

"Me? Oh, I wasn't made for bondage of any kind. Most women marry because they're bored or because they're curious. In either case they pay a penalty. Marriage provides no panacea. One only becomes more bored — with one's own husband — or more curious about other people's husbands."

"Are you curious? You don't look as if you cared enough to be curious."

"I do care." She held her cigarette at arm's length and flicked off its ash with her little finger. "Mr. Wray, I'll let you into a secret. A woman never appears so bored as when she is intensely interested in something — never so much inter-

ested as when she is bored to extinction. I *am* curious. I am trying to learn (without asking you impertinent questions) how on earth you and Mrs. Wray ever happened to marry."

She tilted her chin impudently and looked down her nose at him, her eyes masked by her dark lashes, through which it hardly seemed possible that she could see him at all. Jeff laughed. She had her nerve with her, he thought, but her frankness was amusing. He liked the way she went after what she wanted.

"Oh, Camilla — I don't know. It just happened, I guess. She's more your kind than mine. I'm a good deal of a scrub, Mrs. Cheyne. You see, I never went to college — or even to high school. Camilla knows a lot. She used to teach, but I reckon she's about given up the idea of trying to teach *me*. I'm a low-brow all right. I never read a novel in my life."

"You haven't missed much. Books were only meant for people who are willing to take life at second-hand. One year of the life you lived on the range is worth a whole shelf-ful. The only way to see life is through one's own eyes."

"Oh, I've seen life. I've been a cowboy, rancher, speculator, miner, and other things. And I've seen some rough times. But I wouldn't have worked at those things if I hadn't needed the money. Now I've got it, maybe I'll learn something of the romantic side of life."

She leaned back and laughed at him. "You

dear, delicious man. Then it has never occurred to you that during all these years you've been living a romance?"

He looked at her askance.

"And then, to cap it all," she finished, "you discover a gold mine, and marry the prettiest woman in the West. I suppose you'll call that prosaic, too. You're really quite remarkable. What is it that you expect of life after all?"

"I don't know," he said slowly, "something more ——"

"But there's nothing left."

"Oh, yes, there is. I've only tasted success, but it's good, and I like it. What I've got makes me want more. There's only one thing in the world that really means anything to me — and that's power ——"

"But your money ——"

"Yes, money. But money itself doesn't mean anything to me — idle money — the kind of money you people in New York are content to live on, the interest on land or bonds. It's what live, active money can do that counts with me. My money has got to keep working the way I work — only harder. Some people worship money for what it can buy their bodies. I don't. I can't eat more than three square meals a day. I want my money to make the desert bloom — to make the earth pay up what it owes, and build railroads that will carry its products where they're needed. I want it to take the miserable people away from the alleys in

your city slums and put them to work in God's country, where their efforts will count for something in building up the waste ground that's waiting for them out there. Why, Mrs. Cheyne, last year I took up a piece of desert. There wasn't a thing on it but rabbit-brush. Last spring I worked out a colonization plan and put it through. There's a town there now called Wrayville, with five thousand inhabitants, two hotels, three miles of paved sidewalk, a public school, four factories, and two newspapers. All that in six months. It's a hummer, I can tell you."

As he paused for breath she sighed. "And yet you speak of romance."

"Romance? There's no romance in that. That's just get-up-and-get. I had to hustle, Mrs. Cheyne. I'd promised those people the water from the mountains on a certain date, but I couldn't do it, and the big ditch wasn't finished. I was in a bad fix, for I'd broken my word. Those people had paid me their money, and they threatened to lynch me. They had a mass meeting and were calling me some ugly names when I walked in. Why they didn't take a shot at me then, I don't know — but they didn't. I got up on the table, and, when they stopped yelling, I began to talk to 'em. I didn't know just what to say, but I knew I had to say something and make good — or go out of town in a pine box. I began by telling 'em what a great town Wrayville was going to be. They only yelled, 'Where's our water?' I told them it

was coming. They tried to hoot me down, but I kept on."

"Weren't you afraid?"

"You bet I was. But *they* never knew it. I tried to think of a reason why they didn't have that water, and in a moment they began to listen. I told 'em there was thirty thousand dollars' worth of digging to be done. I told 'em it would *be* done, too, but that I didn't see why that money should go out of Wrayville to a lot of contractors in Denver. I'd been saving that work for the citizens of Wrayville. I was prepared to pay the highest wages for good men, and, if Wrayville said the word, they could begin the big ditch to-morrow."

"What did they do?"

"They stopped yelling right there, and I knew I had 'em going. In a minute they started to cheer. Before I finished they were carrying me around the hall on their shoulders. Phew — but that took some quick thinking."

Mrs. Cheyne had started forward when he began, and, as he went on, her eyes lost their sleepy look, her manner its languor, and she followed him to the end in wonder. When he stopped, she sank back in her corner, smiling, and repeated: "Romance? What romance is there left in the world for a man like you?"

He looked up at her with his baby stare and then laughed awkwardly. "You're making fun of me, Mrs. Cheyne. I've been talking too much, I reckon."

She didn't reply at once, and the look in her eyes embarrassed him. He reached for his cigarette case, offered it to her, and, when she refused, took one himself, lit it slowly, gazing out of the transom opposite.

"I hope I haven't tired you, Mrs. Cheyne. It's dangerous to get me talking about myself. I never know when to stop."

"I don't want you to stop. I've never been so entertained in my life. I don't believe you know how interesting you are."

He turned toward her, embarrassed and still incredulous. "You're very kind," he muttered.

"You mustn't be so humble," she broke in sharply. "You weren't so a minute ago. I like you best when you are talking of yourself."

"I thought I'd like to talk about you."

She waved a hand in deprecation. "Me? Oh, no. We can't come to earth like that. Tell me another fairy tale."

"Fairy tale? Then you don't believe me?"

"Oh, yes," she laughed, "I believe you, but to me they're fairy tales just the same. It seems so easy for you to do wonderful things. I wish you'd do some conjuring for me."

"Oh, there isn't any magic business about me. But I'll try. What do you want most?"

She put an elbow on her knee and gazed at the blossom in her fingers. Her voice, too, fell a note.

"What I think I want most," she said slowly,

"is a way out of this." She waved the blossom vaguely in the direction of the drawing room. "I'm sick of it all, of the same tiresome people, the same tiresome dinners, dances, teas. We're so narrow, so cynical, so deeply enmeshed in our small pursuits. I'm weary — desperately weary of myself."

"You?"

"Yes." And then, with a short, unmirthful laugh, "That's my secret. You didn't suspect it, did you?"

"Lord! no." And after a pause, "You're unhappy about him?"

"Cheyne? Oh, no. He's the only thing I *am* happy about. Have you ever been really bored, Mr. Wray?"

"Never. I never even heard the word until I came to New York."

"Have you ever been so tired that your body was numb — so that if you struck it a blow you were hardly conscious of it, when you felt as if you could go to sleep and never want to wake up? Well, that's the condition of my mind. It's so tired of the same impressions that it fails to make note of them; the people I see, the things I do, are all blurred and colorless like a photograph that has been taken out of focus. The only regret I have when I go to sleep is that I have to wake up again."

"My dear Mrs. Cheyne ——"

"Oh, I'm not morbid. I'm too bored to be morbid even. I don't think I'm even unhappy. It takes an effort to be unhappy. I can't tell you what the matter is. One drifts. I've been drifting

a long time. I think I have too much money. I want to *want* something."

"Don't you ever want anything you can't have?"

She sat upright, and her voice, instead of drawling languidly, came in the quick accents of discovery. "Yes, I do. I've just found out. You've actually created a new interest in life. Won't you be nice to me? Come and see me often and tell me more fairy tales."

CHAPTER VII

BRAEBANK

"I CAN'T see, Curtis," said Mrs. Janney, in the smoking room, "why you chose to ask those vulgar Wrays to Braebank. It almost seems as if you were carrying your business relationships too far. The woman is pretty enough, and I dare say her easy Western ways will be attractive to the masculine portion of your guests. But the man is impossible — absolutely impossible! He does not even use correct English, and his manners — atrocious!"

The palms of the good lady's hands, as she raised them in her righteous wrath, were very pink on the inside, like the petals of rosebuds. They were sheltered hands, very soft and plump, and their fingers bore many large and expensive jewels. Mrs. Janney was made up wholly of convex curves, which neither art nor starvation could deflect. The roundness of her face was further accented by concentric curves at brows, mouth, and chin, which gave the impression of a series of parentheses. It would not be stretching the figure too far to add that Mrs. Janney, in most of their few affiliations, bore a somewhat parenthetical relation to her husband. Her life, as well as her conversation, was made up

of "asides," to which Curtis Janney was not in the habit of paying the slightest attention. Her present remarks, however, seemed to merit a reply.

"My dear Amelia," he said, tolerantly, from his easy chair, "when we were first married you used to say that all a man needed to make his way in New York was a dress suit and a smile. Wray has both. Besides, it is quite necessary to be on good terms with him. As for his wife, I have rarely seen a girl who created such an agreeable impression. Cornelius Bent has taken them up. He has his reasons for doing so. So have I. I'll trouble you, therefore, to be civil."

He got up and put down his cigar, and Mrs. Janney shrugged her shoulders into a more pronounced convexity.

"I won't question your motives, Curtis, though, of course, I know you have them. But I don't think we can afford to jeopardize our standing by always taking up new people like the Wrays. The man is vulgar — the woman, provincial."

Mr. Janney by this time had taken up the telephone and was ordering the wagons to the station.

"Why, Gretchen, dear! You're late. It's almost train time." Miss Janney entered in riding clothes from the terrace, bringing traces of the fine November weather. She was a tall, slender girl of the athletic type, sinuous and strong, with a skin so firm and ruddy from the air that it glowed crisply as though shot with mica.

"Is it, mother? Cortland and I had *such* a won-

derful ride. He is really quite the nicest man in the world. Aren't you, Cort?"

"Of course I am," said Bent, laughing, as he entered, "anything Gretchen says. That's because I never made love to her, isn't it, Gretchen?"

"Partly. Love is so silly. You know, daddy, I've given Cort his *congé*."

Janney turned testily. "What nonsense you children talk!"

"I mean it, though, daddy," she went on calmly. "I'm too fond of Cort ever to think of marrying him. We settled that still more definitely to-day. Since you were so inconsiderate, you two, as to neglect to provide me with a brother, I've adopted Cort."

"Really, Gretchen, you're getting more hopeless every day," sighed her mother. "What does Cortland say?"

"I?" laughed Bent. "What is there left for me to say? We're hopelessly friendly, that's all. I'm afraid there's nothing left but to take to drink. May I?"

He lifted the decanter of Scotch and poured himself a drink, but Janney, with a scowl in the direction of his daughter, left the room.

"You mustn't speak so heartlessly, dear," said Mrs. Janney. "You know it always makes your father angry. You must be patient with her, Cortland."

"I am," said that gentleman, helping himself to a cigarette. "I'm the soul of patience, Mrs.

Janney. I've pleaded and begged. I've even threatened suicide, but all to no purpose. There's no satisfaction in shooting one's self on account of a girl who's going to laugh at your funeral."

He threw himself hopelessly into a big English chair and sighed exuberantly, while Gretchen gave him a reproachful look over her mother's shoulder.

"My poor boy, don't give her up," said the lady, genuinely. "All will come right in time, I'm sure. You must be sweeter to him, Gretchen. You really must."

"I suppose I must," said Gretchen with an air of resignation. "I'll not be any more cruel than I can help."

When the good lady left the room they looked at each other for a moment, and then burst into shameless laughter.

"Poor mother! She never had a sense of humor. I wouldn't laugh at your funeral, though, Cort. That was unkind. You know, I'm afraid father is very much provoked."

Bent's laughter died, and he gazed at the ash of his cigarette. "He's really quite serious about it, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes. It's an awful nuisance, because, in his way, he has a will as strong as mine."

Bent smiled. "I'm glad I'm not in his boots. You're fearfully stubborn, Gretchen."

"Because I insist on marrying whom I choose?"

"Because you insist on not marrying me."

Miss Janney sank in a chair by the table, finger-

ing the pages of a magazine. She said nothing in reply, but in a few moments spoke carelessly.

"Tell me something about Lawrence Berkely, will you?"

"Larry? You've only met him once. Your curiosity is indecent."

"You know he's coming here with the Wrays."

"Not really? That's going a bit strong. I don't think I'll stand for that."

"Oh, yes, you will. He's quite as good as we are. He belongs to *the* Berkelys of Virginia. Mrs. Rumsen knows them."

"That's convincing. Any one Aunt Caroline knows will need no card to Saint Peter. Oh, Larry's all right. But I warn you not to fall in love with him."

"That's precisely what I've done," she asserted.

He glanced at her amusedly, but she met his look coolly.

"It's true, Cort. He's actually the only man I've met since I came out who really isn't eligible. I'm so delighted. Of course, father would never have permitted it if he'd only known that Mr. Berkely wasn't rich. He hasn't much use for poor people. Oh, he's well enough off, I suppose, as Mr. Wray's partner, but then he doesn't own any of that fabulous gold mine."

"How do you know all these things?"

"He told me. Besides, he's terribly good looking, and has had something the matter with his lungs."

"Well, of all the —— "

"That's why he's been living in the West. But he's quite well now. Isn't it splendid? I only hope he'll like me. Don't you think he has wonderful eyes?"

"I'm sure I never noticed. See here, Gretchen, you're talking rot. I'm going to tell your father."

"Oh, I don't care," airily. "But if you do, I'll tell Mr. Wray."

"Wray?"

"Yes — that you're in love with his wife."

Miss Janney exploded this bombshell casually while she removed her hat, watching him carefully meanwhile in the mirror. If she had planned her coup, she could not have been more fully rewarded, for Cortland started up, clutching at the chair arms, his face aghast; but when his eyes met hers in the mirror he sank back again, laughing uneasily.

"What — who on earth put that silly idea into your head?"

"You — yourself. I watched you at the Warringtons."

"What nonsense! I've known Camilla a long time."

"Not so long as you've known me. And you never looked at *me* like that." She laid her hat beside her crop on the table, then turned quickly and put her hand over his on the chair arm. "You may trust me, Cortland, dear. If I'm going to be your sister, I may as well begin at once. It's true, isn't it?"

He remained silent a long while, his gaze fixed

on the open fire before him. Then at last he turned his hand over so that his fingers clasped hers. "Yes," he whispered, "it's true, Gretchen. It's true.'

"I'm so sorry, Cort," she murmured. "I suspected from your letters. I wish I might have helped you. I feel somehow that I am to blame — that we ever got engaged. Won't you tell me how it happened that she married him — instead of you?"

"No, no," he said, rising and walking to the window. "She — she married Wray — because — because she loved him, that's all. I wasn't the man."

Gretchen watched him wistfully, still standing beside the chair he had vacated, full of the first deep sympathy she had ever known. Slowly she walked over and put her hand timidly on his shoulder.

"You'll forgive me, won't you, Cort? I wouldn't have spoken if I had known how deeply you felt." She turned aside with a bitter little laugh. "Isn't it queer that life should be so full of complications? Everybody expects you and me to marry each other — at least, everybody but ourselves, and we won't because — why is it that we won't? Chiefly because everybody expects us to — and because it's so easy. I'm sure if there was any reason why we shouldn't marry, I'd love you quite madly. Instead of which, you're in love with a married woman, and I — I'm interested in a youth with sad romantic eyes and an impaired breathing apparatus."

"Gretchen, don't be silly," he said, smiling in spite of himself.

"I'm really serious — you'll see." She stopped and clutched Bent's arm. "Tell me, Cort. He's not married already, is he?"

"You silly child. Not that I know of. Berkely is a conscientious sort of a bird — he wouldn't have let you make love to him —— "

"I *didn't*," with dignity, "we talked about the weather mostly."

"That must have been romantic."

"Cort, I'll not speak to you again." She rushed past him to the window, her head erect. Outside was the whirr of an arriving motor. "How tiresome. Here come the Billy Havilands," she said, "and they'll want to be playing 'Auction' at once. They always do. As if there was nothing but 'Bridge' in the world!" She sniffed. "I wish we were going to be fewer in number. Just you and I and —— "

"And Larry?"

"Yes — and Mrs. Wray," she put in viciously.

Curtis Janney was already in the big stair hall to welcome the arrivals.

"Billy — Dorothy — welcome! Of course you had to bring your buzz-wagon. I suppose I'll be driven to build a garage some day — but it will be well down by the East Lodge. Do you expect to follow in that thing? Rita! Awfully glad. Your hunter came over last night. He looks fit as a fiddle. Aren't you cold? Gretchen, dear, ring for tea."

Noiseless maids and men-servants appeared,

appropriated wraps and hand baggage, and departed.

"We timed it nicely," said Haviland, looking at his watch. "Forty-seven from the ferry. We passed your wagons a moment ago. Gretchen, who's the red-haired girl with the Rumsens?"

"*Et tu, Brute?* That's Mrs. Wray. None of us has a chance when she's around. Here they are now."

The two station wagons drew up at the terrace, and the guests dismounted. Mr. and Mrs. Rumsen with the Wrays in the station wagon, and the Baroness Charny, the Warringtons, Jack Perot, and Lawrence Berkely in the 'bus.

"Well, Worthy! Got here after all! Caroline, Mrs. Wray, would you like to go right up or will you wait for tea? Wray, there's something stronger just inside. Show him, won't you, Billy?"

Wray entered the big hall with a renewed appreciation of the utility of wealth. The houses in New York which he had seen were, of course, built upon a more moderate scale. He had still to discover that the men of wealth were learning to make their week-ends out of town longer, and that the real home-life of many of them had been transferred to the country, where broad acres and limitless means enabled them to gratify their tastes in developing great estates which would hand down their names in the architectural history of the country when their city houses should be overwhelmed and lost in the march of commerce. Curtis Janney, for all his great responsibilities, was an open-air

man, and he took a real delight in his great Tudor house and stables. The wide entrance hall which so impressed Jeff was designed in the ripe Palladian manner which distinguished the later work of the great Inigo Jones. This lofty room was the keynote of the building — a double cube in shape, the staircase which led from the centre opposite the door ornate in a character purely classic — the doorways to the other rooms on the same floor masterful in structural arrangement and elegant in their grace and simplicity. It almost seemed as though the room had been designed as a framework for the two wonderful Van Dykes which were placed at each side of the stairway.

Jeff smiled as he walked into the smoking room — the smile of possession. He realized, as never before, that taste, elegance, style, were things which could be bought with money, as one would buy stock or a piece of real estate. The only difference between Curtis Janney and himself was that his host had an ancestor or two — while Jeff had none.

Miss Janney had quietly and cleverly appropriated Lawrence Berkely and was already on her way to the conservatory. Jack Perot, who painted the portraits of fashionable ladies, had taken the Baroness to the Long Room, where the English pictures were hung. Camilla, after a few polite comments on the dignity of the house, sat a little aside in silence. Cortland Bent, after a glance toward the door through which Miss Janney had vanished, dropped into the vacant chair beside her.

"I'm so glad to see you," she said genuinely. "You know the magnificence is rather bewildering." She paused and lowered her voice. "It seems as if I hadn't seen you for ages."

"Yes," he murmured. "I'm expecting wings any day now. I'm almost too good to be true."

"You're an angel," she smiled. "I want you to be good, and I'm sure I want you to be true. And yet" — she paused — "this seems the only case in the world where to be true is to be bad."

"You can't make the sun stop shining."

"I don't think I want it to stop shining altogether. You see, I'm selfish. I want it under a cloud, that's all."

There was a pause — significant to them both.

"I am trying, Camilla. I am doing my best. You appreciate that?"

"Yes, but it shouldn't be so hard. I don't think it would be hard for me in your place!"

His eyes questioned.

"Miss Janney — she is adorable." She looked over the rim of her cup at him as she finished her tea. "My dear Cort," she laughed, as she handed it to him, "the best I can say for you is that you have the worst taste in the world. I'm really in love with her myself. I can't see what you could have been thinking of —— "

"Any more than *I* can see what *you* were thinking of."

There was a refuge from the danger toward which

she felt herself drifting, and she took it, addressing her nearest neighbor.

"Mrs. Cheyne, don't you think men have abominable taste?"

"Oh, yes, abominable," laughed the lady. "Ugh! I hate mustaches, too, don't you?"

Camilla turned a shade rosier, but her discomfiture was lost in the laughter of those who remembered that Cheyne had worn a beard.

"You know I didn't mean just that," explained Camilla. "I meant their appreciation of women — their sense of the esthetic —— "

"Anesthetic, Mrs. Wray. That's the only word for a man's perceptions. A French frock, a smart hat, a little deft color, and the plainest of us is a match for the gayest Lothario. They're only bipeds, instincts on legs —— "

"Oh, I say now, Rita," laughed Bent.

"We can't stand for that, Mrs. Cheyne," put in their host. "I suppose you'd think me ungallant if I asked you what kind of instincts women were."

"Instincts with wings," she purred, "angels by intuition, rhapsodists by occupation, and sirens by inheritance. We're not in the least afraid of you, Mr. Janney."

"I should think not. For my part, if I knew that one of you was camping on my trail, I'd give in at once."

"I'm so glad. It's a pet theory of mine that when a woman really sets her cap for a man he had

better give up at once, for she will win him — fortune favoring — in the end. Don't you agree, Mrs. Wray?"

"I've never thought about it, Mrs. Cheyne," said Camilla slowly. "By fortune you mean propinquity?"

"Oh, yes — and other things —— " laughingly. "For instance, if I had fallen in love with a man I shouldn't stop to consider. If he was another woman's husband — say *your* husband, Mrs. Wray — that would only add a new element of interest. The more difficult an undertaking, the greater satisfaction in the achievement."

Camilla looked at her steadily for a moment. "I've never thought that any man ought to be dignified by such extraordinary effort. A husband so easily won away is not worth keeping."

The two women had only met once before. They both smiled, sweetly tolerant, their weapons politely sheathed. Only Cortland Bent, who knew the hearts of both, sensed the difference between them.

"You're very flattering, Rita," he broke in, "especially to the bipeds. You've carefully deprived us of every attribute but legs. But we still have those — and can run."

"But you don't," laughed Mrs. Cheyne. "That's just the point. You like the game — all of you. Even your legs aren't proof against flattery."

"Stop, Rita," put in Betty Haviland. "You're letting out all the secrets of the craft."

"Come, Camilla," said Cortland, rising, "wouldn't you like to see the horses and dogs? It's not nearly dark yet."

"Oh, yes," she cried gladly. And then to her host, "What am I to expect, Mr. Janney, silver feed troughs and sterilized water?"

"Oh, no," said their host, "not yet. But they're worth it."

The pair made their way through the library and a small corridor which led to the south portico.

"How do you like my cousin Rita?" Bent asked when they were alone outside.

"Is she your cousin?"

"Through my mother — the Davidges. Quite wonderful, eh?"

"I don't like her. You don't mind my saying so, do you?"

"Not in the least. She's not your sort, Camilla. But then nobody ever takes Rita seriously. She doesn't want them to. She's a spoiled darling. Everybody pets her. That bored kind of cleverness is effective — but everybody knows she doesn't mean half she says."

"I'd be sorry to think she meant anything she says," severely.

Bent laughed. "I'm afraid you're too sincere for my crowd, Camilla."

"Who is *Mr.* Cheyne?" she asked suddenly.

"A perfectly amiable person with a bald head and a passion for domesticity and music, both of which Rita affects to despise."

"Why did she marry him then?"

"Nobody knows. It was one of the marriages that weren't made in Heaven, that's all."

"Few marriages are, but they're none the less binding because of that."

"Yes, I know," he said soberly.

She recognized the minor note and turned the subject quickly.

"What a heavenly spot! These are the stables, of course. And the buildings beyond?"

"The kennels. Mr. Janney has his own pack — corking hounds. They've been breeding this strain a long while in England. I suppose they're as good as any in the world."

"I'm wild to see them."

The head groom met them at the door of the carriage house and showed them through. The much despised touring car of the Havilands occupied a negligible part of the great floor. The coach, brake, carryall, station wagons, victoria, runabouts, and brake-carts — all in royal blue with primrose running-gear — looked down with an old-fashioned dignity and disapprobation on this product of a new civilization. The paneled walls of the room were covered with sporting prints, and the trophy room, with its cabinets of cups and ribbons, bore eloquent testimony to Curtis Janney's success at horse shows in every large city of the country.

In the stables Camilla lost all sense of restraint. A stable had never meant anything like this. The cement floors were spotless, and the long line of stalls of polished wood with brass newels and fittings shone like the silver in the drawing room. The mats and blankets were of blue, and each bore the monogram of the owner in yellow.

"These are the coach and carriage horses, Camilla," Bent explained.

"Yes, ma'am," put in the groom. "The hunters are here," and he led the way to the box stalls.

"Where is Mackinaw? Mr. Janney promised him to me for to-morrow."

"Oh, Mackinaw is right here, ma'am. And a fine bit of flesh he is." He went in and threw off the blanket, while Camilla followed. "Not a blemish. He'll take his four rails like they was two. Just give him his head, and you won't be far off when they kill."

"Oh, what a darling! I'm wild to get on him. Is he gentle?"

She patted him on the neck, and he nosed her pocket for sugar. One by one she saw them all, and they reached the kennels in time for the evening meal.

"Oh, well," she sighed as they turned back toward the house, "I'm almost reconciled to riches. One could live in a place like this and forget there was anything else in the world."

"Yes, perhaps some people might," he said sig-

nificantly. "I couldn't, even if I wanted to. The only real joy in life is the memory of Saguache Peak at sunset."

"Sunsets pass — they're symbols of the brevity of things beautiful —— ".

"But the night is long," he murmured. "So long, and so dark."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BRUSH

JEFF WRAY was learning many things. The arrival of Lawrence Berkely on the scene had at first seemed rather alarming. Several wires in cipher before Larry reached New York had apprised Jeff of an uncertain state of mind in members of the directorate of the Denver and Western Railroad Company. Collins, Hardy, and even Jim Noakes had been approached by representatives of the Chicago and Utah with flattering offers for their interests in the D. & W., and Berkely reported them on the horns of a dilemma. Collins and Hardy were big owners of land which lay along the trunk line and were dependent on that company for all facilities for moving their wheat and other crops. It had not always been easy to get cars to haul their stuff to market, and this fall they only got their hay and potatoes in by a dispensation from the men higher up. Noakes, as Jeff well knew, owned stock in the through line, but the showing of the Saguache Mountain Development Company for the year had been so strong that he had felt sure his associates would see the importance of keeping their interests intact, temporizing, where they could, with the Denver crowd,

who had it in their power to threaten his connections at Saguache.

Mulrennan was wiring Jeff, too—copiously. There was an election pending in Kinney, and the Denver crowd had advanced a candidate for judge in opposition to the party with which Pete was affiliated. Other reports both in New York and from the West indicated a strong pressure from the East on the officers of the D. & W. Berkely viewed all these indications of a concerted movement against Jeff's railroad with increasing dismay and lost no time in giving him his opinion as to the possible outcome of the raid.

But Jeff apparently was losing no sleep over the situation. He was fully aware that the whole movement had originated in New York, and that Cornelius Bent and his crowd were back of it. He knew, too, that the Amalgamated Reduction Company wanted his new smelter. Long ago he had foreseen this possibility and had laid his own plans accordingly. The Denver and Saguache was his. With Noakes, Collins, and Hardy, he had a control of the Denver and Western, but their possible defection, which he had also foreseen, had made other plans necessary. Three months before he came East he had unobtrusively secured through other persons a right of way from Saguache to Pueblo, a distance of one hundred and twenty miles. The line of this survey was well to the southward and would open up a country occupied only by small settlers under the Homestead laws. He had turned the organi-

zation of the Development Company loose for two months on that vast tract of land, and had, at a reasonably small expense, secured by purchase or long-time options the most valuable land along his new line. His engineers were Germans, imported for the work, who had no affiliations with other roads, and his plans had so far worked out to a T. He had also worked out (on paper) an irrigation scheme for the whole proposition.

At Pueblo the new road would connect with the Denver and California, a line which had no connection with the Chicago and Utah, and which had even been recently engaged in a rate war with the other roads to the coast. Its officers were friendly, and Wray's plans had all been worked out in their confidence and with their approval. Indeed, a good part of his backing had been furnished by capitalists in San Francisco.

Jeff felt sure that the first move to capture the D. & W. was only a bluff, and in his conferences with General Bent, Janney, and McIntyre, had played a waiting game. The "Daisy" was now a producer — not a producer like the "Lone Tree" — but it was paying, and the "Comet," a new prospect that had been opened farther south, was doing a business of a hundred to the ton. His stamps were working night and day, and the smelter was doing its share in Wray's triumphant progress. All his other plans were working out, and the longer he could wait the more formidable he could make himself as an adversary. He knew that the crux of the

situation was the ambition of the Amalgamated Reduction Company. They controlled every smelting concern in three states, and Wray's big plant was a thorn in their side. By waiting, Jeff hoped that he could make them show their hands, so he made no attempt to force an issue, being content to play the part they themselves had assigned him. Their hospitality, his welcome into their exclusive set, his use of their clubs (to two of which he had been proposed for membership), the business associations they were planning for him, did little to convince Jeff of the sincerity of their attentions. But he acted the dupe with a good grace, with one eye to windward, greatly amused at their friendliness, which, while it failed to flatter, gave him an increasing sense of the importance of his mission. General Bent had intimated that within a week or so he would be in a position to make a definite proposition for his railroad, which, of course, meant the absorption of Wray's plant into the Trust. Financially, there were great possibilities in a friendly association with these men.

They were closely in touch with No. — Broadway and, if they chose, could point the way to power such as he had never dreamed of. But in his heart he mistrusted them. He thought of Mrs. Rumsen's words of warning, and he knew that what she said was true. They would not spare him if he offered them a chance which would give them a command of the situation. Well, they hadn't command of it yet, and he knew he held some cards which they had

never seen. If they continued to weave their web as they had begun it, there would still be time to side-step.

Meanwhile, he gave himself up to a thorough enjoyment of the situation. There was nothing he liked better than a fight, and the fact that his adversaries were formidable lent a zest to the situation. He reassured Larry, sent a lot of wires to Mulrennan, took a few successful flyers in the stock market (which went to show that his luck had not yet turned), and spent his leisure moments in a riding school uptown going over the jumps with Camilla.

Curtis Janney's dinner table held nothing in common with General Bent's. The viands were well cooked but not heavy; the wines of a lighter variety, dry, for the most part, and sparkling; the service deft and dignified but not austere. The table decorations were not made up of set-pieces from the florists', but came from Janney's own conservatories and were more in the way of colored embroideries against the damask cloth. General conversation was, therefore, continuous, and every person at this table could see and be seen by every other. The formality of the city seemed to be banished by common consent, and Camilla, who went in with Cortland Bent (a mischievous dispensation of Miss Janney), felt very much at home in the frank, friendly atmosphere. Almost all the conversation, she discovered, was of the "horsey" variety, at least at Camilla's end of the table, where their host pre-

sided, and, as she had never ridden to hounds before, she seized the opportunity to acquaint herself with the interesting details of the morning which awaited her.

The Sunnybrook Hunt Club, she learned, was only a mile away, but on certain days the Braebank hounds were used and members of the Hunt Club living in the vicinity added their numbers to the field. There were plenty of foxes, Mr. Janney assured her, and to-morrow they were to draw a cover over toward the Chelten Hills. Mrs. Cheyne, she heard, was thought to be the best horsewoman in the county. Her own country-place was but five miles away, and, in spite of her boasted love of ease, she was to be found at every Meet in the season, no matter how early the hour. To-morrow was to be one of the big days of the year, Mr. Janney informed Camilla, and all the farmers over whose fields they hunted were invited to lunch after the Meet, in the Long Gallery.

So when, in the early morning, after a light breakfast, Mr. Janney's guests met on the terrace, it was with a feeling of intense interest and excitement that Camilla drew on her gloves and joined them. Of the men, Curtis Janney, Worthington Rumsen, and Billy Haviland wore the pink coats with gray facings of Sunnybrook, while their host wore in addition the velvet cap which distinguished him as Master of the Hounds. The hounds were already loose on the great lawn, while the Huntsman and Whippers-in rode among them. The sun had not yet risen,

and the heavy frost which lay upon the lawns caught the chill greenish opalescent tints of the dawn. Mrs. Cheyne was already in the saddle, her hunter, a lean, rangy boy, pirouetting and mouthing his bits, eager to be off. The Baroness Charny, dainty and very modish in a dark green habit and silk hat, was chatting gaily with Larry Berkely while a groom adjusted her stirrup-leather. Mrs. Haviland, Wray, Perot, and her host were waiting for their horses, which the men were bringing up from the stables. Curtis Janney came forward gaily when Camilla appeared.

"We're all here, Mrs. Wray," he greeted her. "The others will meet us at the Chelten Cross-roads. Your horse is ready," and then, with a glance at her habit, "You're riding across, I believe?"

She nodded. "What a heavenly morning!"

"The conditions are perfect. This white frost will soften at sun-up. We'll have a fine run. Won't you let me help you mount?"

They were all in the saddle in a few moments and, walking their horses, with the Huntsman and hounds in the lead, were soon on their way past the big entrance gates. Camilla saw Jeff draw his horse alongside that of Mrs. Cheyne and realized that the few days during which Lawrence Berkely had been in the city had done much for her husband's appearance. She saw the look and heard the laugh with which Mrs. Cheyne greeted her husband and experienced, in spite of herself, a sense of annoyance that Jeff continually showed a

preference for her company to that of any of the other women of the party. She knew that in her heart it made no difference to her into whose hands Jeff entrusted himself. Mrs. Cheyne's languid air of patronage had provoked her, and her pride rebelled at the thought of any slight, however thoughtless, at the hands of her husband. But as Cortland Bent came alongside of her, she realized that the friendly relations of her husband and his feminine partner might progress far on extravagantly sentimental lines and still provide no just cause for complaint.

If Mrs. Cheyne had any mental reservations, her graceful back gave no sign of them. She sat her horse squarely, even a little stiffly, which brought into contrast the easy, rather slouchy seat which Jeff had learned on the plains. But Wray was in his element. On a horse, at least, he felt himself the equal of any one in the party and need ask no favors or give any. He examined Mrs. Cheyne's costume curiously. Her long coat was a mere subterfuge, for beneath it she wore white breeches like his own and patent leather boots. Her hair was done in a compact mass on the back of her head, and her hat was held in place by a strong elastic band. The shoulders of her coat were square and her manner easy. He recalled the flowing feminine lines of her costume at dinner the night before, and it seemed difficult to appreciate that she was the same person with whom he had talked so late in the smoking room.

"Am I a freak?" she asked amiably, "or is there a hiatus somewhere? I dressed in a tearing hurry — without a maid."

"Oh, no. Only you're another kind of a person — on the back of a horse."

"Am I? How?"

"Last night you were all woman. You and I are making friends pretty fast, but I was a little afraid of you."

"Why?"

"You're different at night, so sleepy and handsome, like a rattler in the sun, the kind you hate to wake up but must, to see how far he'll strike."

She laughed. "I don't know whether I like that or not. And yet I think I do. How am I different to-day?"

"To-day you're only part woman. The rest of you is just kid. If it wasn't for that knot of hair I'd take you for a boy — a very nice, good-looking boy."

She looked up at him mischievously. "You know you have a faculty of saying unpleasant things very pleasantly. I'm glad I look youthful. My only horror is of growing old. I don't think I like the idea of your thinking me anything unfeminine."

He glanced frankly at her protruding knee. "I don't. Most of you is woman all right — but you don't scare me half as much this morning."

"Why should you be scared? You haven't struck me as being a man who could be scared at anything."

"Not out here, but inside — in the drawing room — you've got me at a disadvantage. I'm new to soft speeches, low lights, and the way you Eastern women dress. There's too much glamor. I never know whether you mean what you say or whether it's all just a game — and I'm *It.*"

She threw back her head and laughed with a full throat.

"You dear, delicious, impossible creature! Don't you know that the world is a tangle of illusions, and that you and I and everybody else were made to help keep them tangled? Nobody ever means what he says. Half of the joy in life consists in making people think you different from what you are."

"Which are you? The kid on the horse or the woman — back there — last night?"

"Do you think I'll tell you?"

"No, I suppose not. And it wouldn't help me much if you're going to lie about it — I mean," he corrected, "if you're trying to keep me guessing."

"My poor, deluded friend, you wouldn't believe me if I told you. So what's the use. For the present," she added defiantly, "I'm the kid on the horse."

"And I guess I'm *It,* all right," he laughed.

As they approached Chelten Hills they made out at the cross-roads a number of figures on horseback. The sun, a pale madder ball, had suddenly sprung from behind the hills and painted with its rosy hues the streaks of mist which hung in the valleys below

them. As its shadows deepened and its glow turned from pink to orange, the figures at the cross-roads stood out in silhouette against the frosty meadows beyond. There were three women and at least a dozen men, most of them wearing the club colors, which took on added brilliancy as the sun emerged from behind the distant hills. A cloud of vapor rose from the flanks of the horses. There was much "hallo-ing" and waving of riding crops as the Huntsman and his hounds rode into their midst and the two parties met. A brief consultation, and the hounds were sent down a narrow lane and across a wooden bridge toward a patch of woods which darkened the hillside half a mile away.

"We'll draw that cover first," said Curtis Janney. "Perhaps we can coax the old Chelten Fox to come out to-day." It was the name they had given to an old quarry of theirs, the elusive victor in half a dozen runs in the last few years.

Cortland Bent had refused to relinquish his post beside Camilla. There seemed no reason why he should, since Gretchen had so completely appropriated Larry, and Jeff, Mrs. Cheyne

"Be careful, Camilla," he was saying. "You're new at this game, and the going is none too safe."

But Camilla only smiled. She looked forward at Mrs. Cheyne's intolerant back, and there was a joyous flash in her eyes like the one he remembered two years ago when she led the chase of a coyote, which she ran down and roped unaided. She leaned forward gaily and patted her horse's neck.

"We understand each other, don't we, Mackinaw?"

And then, as though to express her emancipation from all earthly barriers, she gave her horse his head in the pasture and followed a party which had scorned the open gate. Mackinaw took the three rails like a bird and shook his head viciously when Camilla restrained him. Cortland followed her, smiling, and in a moment they had all stopped at the foot of the hill, while the hounds went forward into the cover.

Janney had planned well. They waited a while, chatting among themselves, and then suddenly the hounds gave tongue. At the farther end of the cover, taking a diagonal course across an old cornfield up the hill, the old fox emerged, while the hounds, getting the scent, followed hot-foot after him.

"Tally-ho!" was the cry from one of the whips, and it echoed again and again the length of the field. In a second they were off, Curtis Janney in the lead, roaring some instructions which nobody understood. Camilla, overanxious, cleared the brook at a bound and won her way among the leaders. Gretchen Janney and Mrs. Cheyne, their horses well in hand, were a little to the left, following the Master, whose knowledge of the lay of the land foresaw that the run would follow the ridge which farther on turned to the eastward. Camilla only knew that she must ride straight, and went forward up the hill toward the line of bushes around which the last hound had disappeared. Bent thundered after her, watching her anxiously as she took the fence at the top of

the hill — a tall one — and landed safely in the stubble beyond.

"Pull up a little, Camilla!" he shouted. "You'll blow him if you don't. This may last all morning."

"I — I can't!" she cried. "He's pulling me. He doesn't want to stop, and neither do I."

"It's the twenty pounds of under weight — but you'd better use your curb."

As they cleared the bushes they "viewed" again from a distance the hounds running in a straight line, skirting a pasture at the edge of a wood half a mile away. The field below to their left was now a thin line of single horsemen or groups of twos and threes. Behind Bent were Billy Haviland and the Baroness. Down the hill they went, more carefully this time, then up again over rocky ground dotted with pitfalls of ice and snow which made the going hazardous. Janney's crowd below on the level meadows was forging ahead, but when Camilla reached the top of the next hill she saw that, instead of surging toward the river, the hounds were far away to the right in open country and going very fast. They reached the road from the meadow just as Curtis Janney, closely followed by Gretchen and Mrs. Cheyne, Larry, and Jeff, came riding into the open.

"Have you 'viewed'?"

Cortland Bent pointed with his crop, and they all saw the pack making for the woods and the trees which lined the creek in the hollow beyond. It was a wide stretch of open country made up of half a dozen fields and fences. The short, sharp cry

of the hounds as they sighted the fox was music to Camilla, but the roar of the wind in her ears and the thunder of the horses' hoofs were sweeter. It was a race for the creek. The Master, on his big thoroughbred, was three lengths in the lead, but Jeff, Mrs. Cheyne, and Camilla, just behind him, were taking their jumps together.

At the third fence, for some reason, Mackinaw refused, and, scarcely knowing how it had happened, Camilla slid forward over his ears to the ground. She was a little stunned, but managed to keep her hold on the reins, and before Cortland Bent could dismount she was on her feet again, her cheeks a little pale, but in nowise injured.

"Are you hurt, Camilla?"

"No. Help me up quickly, Cort." She had seen Jeff and Mrs. Cheyne draw rein a moment on the other side of the fence, but, when she rose, ride on together. Jeff shouted something to her, but she could not hear it.

"I didn't give him his head," Camilla stammered. "I'll know better now."

"For God's sake, be careful," whispered Bent.

If she heard him she gave no sign of it, for, with her face pale and her lips compressed, she made a wide turn, and, before the rest of the field came up, she had put Mackinaw at the jump again, giving him his head and the crop on his flank just before he rose to it. The frightened animal cleared the rails with two feet to spare and a good six feet on the farther side, and, when Jeff turned at the bank of

the creek to look, he saw Mackinaw nobly clearing the last fence that remained between them.

Camilla, her color coming slowly back, kept her eyes fixed on the smart silk hat of Mrs. Cheyne. The memory of Mrs. Cheyne's smile infuriated her. Her manner was so superior, her equipment so immaculate, her seat such a fine pattern of English horsemanship. The run was to be long, they said. Perhaps there would still be time to show that she could ride — as the boys in the West rode, for every inch — for every pound.

Through the ford she dashed, with Cortland close at her heels, the water deluging them both, up the bank and over the rise of the hill, toward a patch of bushes where the fox doubled and went straight with the wind across the valley for the hills. The going was rougher here — boulders, stone walls, and ploughed fields. Camilla cut across the angle and in a moment was riding beside her husband and Mrs. Cheyne, who seemed to be setting the pace.

"Are you all right?" Jeff asked. But she only smiled at him and touched Mackinaw with her heel. She was riding confidently now, sure of herself and surer of her horse. They understood each other, and Mackinaw responded nobly, for when he found his place by the side of Rita Cheyne's bay mare he sensed the will of his rider that here was the horse that he must outstay. The pace was terrific, and once or twice Camilla felt the eyes of the other woman upon her, but she rode joyously, grimly, looking neither to left nor right, as she

realized that Mrs. Cheyne's mount was tiring and that Mackinaw seemed to be gaining strength at every jump.

The old Chelten Fox gained immortality that day. Twice the foremost hounds were snapping at his very heels, when, from some hidden source of energy, he drew another store and ran away from them, doubling through the brush and throwing them off the scent, which they recovered only when he had put a safe distance between them. Camilla had lost her hat, her hair had fallen about her shoulders, and a thorn had gashed her cheek. The pace was telling on Mackinaw, whose stride was not so long or his jumps so powerful, but Mrs. Cheyne still rode beside her, her face a little paler than before, but her seat as firm — her hands as light as ever. If there were any other riders near them, both women were oblivious, seeing nothing but the blur of the flying turf beneath them, hearing nothing but the sharp note of the hounds in front, which told that the chase was nearly ended.

Before them was a lane with two fences of four rails, an "in and out," with a low "take off" from the meadow. Camilla rose in her stirrups to look and saw that Mrs. Cheyne had drawn rein. It was a jump which would tax the mettle of fresher animals. With a smile on her face which might have been a counterfeit of the one Mrs. Cheyne had worn earlier in the morning, Camilla turned in her saddle, catching the eye of her companion, and pointed with her crop straight before her to where the hounds

had "killed" in the meadow just beyond, then set Mackinaw for the highest panel she could find.

"Come on, Mrs. Cheyne!" she cried hoarsely. "Come on!"

Mackinaw breasted the fence and reached the road — a pause of a second until Camilla's spurs sank into his flanks, when, mad with pain, he leaped forward into the air, just clearing the other fence and the ditch that lay on the farther side. Camilla pulled up sharply as the Huntsman dismounted and made his way among the dogs. Turning, she saw Mrs. Cheyne's horse rise awkwardly from the lane and go crashing through the fence, breaking the top rail and landing in the ditch. Its rider, thrown forward out of the saddle, landed heavily and then rolled to one side and lay quiet.

With a quick cry of dismay, Camilla dismounted, conscience-stricken, and ran to her fallen foe, just as the others rode up and caught the frightened horse.

"Dear Mrs. Cheyne," she heard herself saying, "I'm so sorry. Are you really badly hurt?" But the only reply she got was a feeble shake of the head. Curtis Janney brought out a brandy flask, and, after a sip or two, Mrs. Cheyne revived and looked about her.

"I'm all here, I think," she said. "That was a bad cropper — in my own barnyard, too — the Brush must be yours, Mrs. Wray. Give me a cigarette, somebody."

CHAPTER IX

THE SHADOW

MRS. CHEYNE'S farmhands and stablemen came running and took the horses of those who dismounted; and Mrs. Cheyne, after examining herself to see that no bones were broken, led the way, stiffly but without assistance, to the house. Camilla, still a little bewildered, saw Mackinaw led off to the stable for a rub-down. The Master of the Hounds was the first to congratulate her.

"Here is your Brush, Mrs. Wray. You've filled every woman's heart with envy, To be in at the death of the old Chelten Fox is an achievement. You had a fall. Are you injured?"

"I believe not," she said. "Mackinaw is a darling. I hope he's sound?" she inquired anxiously.

"As a bell," he said generously. "He's got the heart of an ox. You know" — he laughed and whispered — "I bought him from Mrs. Cheyne, and to-day you've vindicated me."

Others came up, men of the Hunt Club, and asked to be presented, and Camilla, enjoying her triumph, followed the party to the house.

Mrs. Cheyne's house differed in character from

"Turning, she saw Mrs. Cheyne's horse go crashing through the fence."

that of the Janneys. It was snugly built in a pocket of the hills, facing to the south. The original building, square and massive, dated from the early eighteenth century, but two symmetrical wings at the sides had greatly increased its original size. Large pillars and a portico gave the graceful lines which the addition demanded. The wide stair hall which ran from front to back had not been altered, and the furniture and hangings rigidly preserved the ancient atmosphere.

The surprised butler and his assistant hurriedly prepared hot Scotches and toddy, and the halls and large rooms on the lower floor were soon filled with the swaggering company — all talking at once, each with his tale of luck or misfortune.

It was not until Camilla was gratefully enthroned in a big chair by the open fireplace that Cortland Bent found a chance to speak to her.

"What possessed you, Camilla? You rode like a demon. You've dragged poor Rita's pride in the mire. Riding is her long suit. She's not used to yielding her laurels as she did to-day. I fancy she's not at all happy about it."

"Why?" asked Camilla, wonderingly.

"You don't know Rita as I do. She runs things out here pretty much in her own way." He chuckled quietly. "Good Lord, but you did put it over her."

"I'm sorry if she feels badly about it," she put in mendaciously.

"There's nothing to be sorry about. You won out against odds on a horse she'd thrown into the

discard. That doesn't make her feel any sweeter. She's a queer one. There's no telling how she'll take things. But she doesn't like being the under dog, and she won't forget this soon."

"Neither will I," said Camilla, smiling to herself. "She scored one on me yesterday, but I fancy our accounts are about even."

"Yes, they are. I suppose there's no use warning you."

"No, there isn't, Cort. I fancy I'll be able to look out for myself."

He examined her keenly and realized that she was looking at Jeff, who stood with some men at the end of the room toasting their hostess. He seemed to have forgotten Camilla's existence. In the field before they came into the house Jeff had spoken to her, and when Janney had given Camilla the Brush, Jeff had congratulated her noisily and with the heartiness and enthusiasm he always showed over things which reflected credit on himself. In their private life Jeff still stood a little in awe of Camilla. He realized that his many deficiencies put him at a disadvantage with a woman of her stamp, and, no matter what he felt, he had never asked more of her in the way of companionship than she had been willing to give him ungrudgingly; he was tolerant of her literary moods, her music, her love of pictures, and the many things he could not understand. She was the only cultured woman he had ever known, and his marriage had done little to change his way of thinking of her.

Camilla had not meant to abide forever in the shrine in which Jeff had enthroned her.

In the earlier days of their married life she had been willing to sit enshrined because it had been the easiest way to conceal the actual state of her own mind; because it had come to be a habit with her — and with him to behold her there. Their pilgrimage to New York had made a difference. It was not easy for Camilla to define it just yet. He was a little easier in his ways with her, regarded her inaccessibility a little less seriously, and questioned by his demeanor rather than by any spoken words matters which had long been taken for granted by them both. He had made no overt declaration of independence and, in his way, gave her opinions the same respect he had always given them. The difference, if anything, had been in the different way in which they viewed from the very same angle the great world of affairs. Men, as Jeff had always known, were much the same all the world over, but, curiously enough, he had never seen fit to apply any rule to its women. It was flattery, indeed, for him to have believed for so long that, because Camilla was cultured, all cultured women must be like Camilla. His wife realized that Jeff's discovery of Mrs. Cheyne was requiring a readjustment of all his early ideas. And so, while she spoke lightly of Mrs. Cheyne to Cortland Bent, in her heart she was aware that if the lady took it into her pretty head to use Jeff as a weapon she might herself be put upon the defensive.

It seemed as though Cortland had an intuition of what was passing in her mind.

"If there's any way in which I can be of service," he ventured.

"Oh, yes, Cort," she laughed. "I'll call on you. The only thing I ask of you now is — not to fall in love with Mrs. Cheyne."

"Rita? I'd as soon think of falling in love with a kaleidoscope. Besides ——"

But she laid restraining fingers on his arm.

"Tell me about Gretchen," she interrupted quickly.

"There's nothing to tell, except," he said with a sigh, "that she's quite gone on Larry."

"You can't mean it?"

"Really — she told me so."

Camilla glanced toward the hall where the two young people were sitting in the big haircloth sofa engaged in a harmless investigation of the science of palmistry.

Camilla laughed. "It really looks so, doesn't it? I am sorry, though. I had begun to look on Miss Janney as one of the solutions of our difficulty."

"There isn't any solution of it — not that way — you must take my word for it. Gretchen and I understand each other perfectly. If I can do anything to help Lawrence Berkely with her, I'll do it."

"Oh, you're quite hopeless, Cort," she sighed, "and I have no patience with Larry. I can't see why he doesn't mind his own business."

Bent glanced at the young couple in the hall.

"He seems to me to be doing *that* tolerably well." He leaned forward so that his tone, though lowered, could be heard distinctly.

"There is another solution. Perhaps you had not thought of it." She turned her head quickly and searched his face for a meaning. For reply he coolly turned his gaze in the direction of Jeff and Mrs. Cheyne, who had withdrawn into an embrasure of one of the windows.

"A solution ——" she stammered.

"Yes, a way out — for both of us."

"You mean Jeff — and Mrs. Cheyne?" she whispered."

"I do."

The poison of his suggestion flowed slowly through her mind, like a drug which stimulates and stupefies at the same time.

"You mean that I should allow Jeff — that I should connive in his ——" She stopped, horror-stricken. "Oh, Cort, that was unworthy of you," she whispered.

"I mean it. They're well met — those two," he finished viciously.

Camilla held up her fingers pleadingly. "Don't speak. I forbid you." And, rising, she took up her gloves and crop from the table. "Besides," she said more lightly, "I have a suspicion that you are trying to stir up a tempest in a teapot."

"Do you mean you haven't noticed?" he insisted. "At my father's? At the Warringtons'? Last night at the Janneys'?"

"No," she replied carelessly, "I hadn't noticed."

Curtis Janney, who had been moving fussily from one group to another, came forward as he saw Camilla rise.

"I was hoping we might still get another short run, but I suppose you're too tired, Mrs. Wray?"

"A little — but don't let me interfere. I think I can find my way back."

He looked at his watch. "Hello! It's time we were off anyway. The other guests will be eating all our breakfast. Come, Cort, Gretchen, Mrs. Cheyne — you know you're my guest still," strolling from group to group and ruthlessly breaking up the tête-a-têtes so successfully that Rita Cheyne rebelled.

"You're a very disagreeable person, Mr. Janney — Ivywild resents it. You're trying to form the hospitality of the county into one of those horrid trusts. Every time accident throws the hunt my way you insist on dragging it off to Braebank. It isn't fair. Of course, if you insist ——"

And then, crossing to Camilla, "*Dear* Mrs. Wray, I'm borrowing your husband for a while. I feel a little tired, so he promised to lunch with me here and go on to Braebank later. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not in the least, my *dear* Mrs. Cheyne. I'm *so* sorry you feel badly." And then to her husband, "Remember, Jeff, Mr. Janney expects you later." Each spoke effusively, the tips of their fingers just touching. Then Mrs. Cheyne followed her visitors to the door.

Outside a coach-horn was blowing, and, as they emerged upon the porch the Janney brake arrived, tooled by the coachman and bearing aloft Mrs. Rumsen, General Bent, and Gladys, who had arrived from town on the morning train. But they would not get down, and the cavalcade soon wound its way along the drive, leaving Jeff and Mrs. Cheyne waving them a good-by from the steps.

Camilla took the road thoughtfully. It was the first time in their brief social career that Jeff had not consulted her before he made his own plans. She did not blame him altogether, for she knew that Jeff's inexperience made him singularly vulnerable to the arts of a woman of the type of Mrs. Cheyne, who, for want of any better occupation in life, had come to consider all men her lawful prey. Camilla knew that mild flirtations were the rule rather than the exception in this gay world where idle people caught at anything which put to flight the insistent demon of weariness and boredom. And she discovered that it was a part of the diversion of the younger married couples to loan husbands and wives to satisfy the light fancy of the hour. All this was a part of the fabric in which she and Jeff were living and endangered society only when the women were weak and the men vicious. But Jeff somehow didn't seem to fit into the picture. His personality she had learned to associate with significant achievements. His faults, as well as his virtues, were big, and he had a habit of scorning lesser sins. The pleasure of a

mild flirtation such as his brothers of the city might indulge in for the mere delight of the society of a woman would offer nothing to Jeff, who was not in the habit of doing anything mildly or by halves. Camilla knew him better than Mrs. Cheyne did.

Of course, no one thought anything of his new interest in Mrs. Cheyne. All of the younger men were interested in Mrs. Cheyne at one time or another, and it was doubtful if people had even noticed his attentions. Cortland had, but there was a reason for that. Anything that could discredit Jeff in her eyes was meat and drink to him. But it was cruel of Cortland to take advantage of her isolation, but how could she cut herself off from Cort, when her husband, by the nature of the situation, had thrown her so completely on his mercies? It seemed as though all the world was conspiring to throw her with the one man whose image she had promised her conscience she would wipe from her heart. He rode beside her now remorselessly, proving by his silence more eloquent the measure of his appreciation of the situa She felt that he, too, war entering the Val Indecision, with the sur p of a dawnin while she faltered on nk of the Despond.

They had fallen well the lowed a quiet lane bor ces which still clung ten s of their autumn finery. ream,

fed by the early snows, which sang musically of the secrets of earth and sky. There was no indecision here. Every twig, every painted stone, the sky and breeze, spoke a message of blithe optimism. All was right with the world, and if doubt crept into the hearts of men it was because they were deaf to the messages of Nature. The spell of its beauty fell on Camilla, too, and she found herself smiling up at Cortland Bent. There were many things to be thankful for.

"Are you happy?" he asked.

"One can't be anything else on a day like this."

"You don't care then?"

"For what? Oh, yes. I have a natural interest in the welfare of my husband. But I think Mrs. Cheyne is wasting her time."

"I think perhaps you underrate her," he muttered.

"I'd rather underrate Mrs. Cheyne than underrate myself," proudly.

He was silent for a moment, flicking at the weeds with his riding-crop.

"Mrs. Cheyne and you have nothing in common, Camilla," he said. "I'm afraid it isn't in you to understand this crowd. The set in which she and I were brought up is a little world in itself. The things which happen outside of it are none of its concern. It doesn't care. It has its own rules and its own code of decency to which it makes its members subscribe. It is New York in miniature, the essence, the cream of its vices, its virtues, and its follies. It lives like that poison-ivy along the

fence, stretching out its tendrils luxuriously in the direction of the sun, moving along the line of least resistance. It does not care what newer growth it stunts, what blossom learns to grow beneath its shade, to fade and droop, perhaps to wither for lack of air and sunlight ——"

"And yet — there's Gretchen," she said, "and you."

He smiled almost gaily. "Yes, there are many Gretchens, thank God. Girls with the clean, sound vision of their sturdy forbears, whose mothers were young when the city still felt the impress of its early austerities."

"And you?" she repeated.

His brow darkened and he looked straight before him.

"What I am doesn't matter. I was born and bred in this atmosphere. Isn't that enough?"

"It's enough that you survived — that you, too, have a clean vision."

"No, that is not true," he said sharply. "I can't see clearly — I'm not sure that I want to see clearly — not now."

"I won't believe that, Cort. Back there at *her* house you said something that was unworthy of you, that showed me another side of your nature, the dark side, like the shadowy places under the ivy. I want you to forget that you ever said them — that you ever thought them even."

"I can't," he muttered savagely. "I *want* some one to come between you — to make him suffer

what I am suffering — to place a distance between you which nothing can ever repair."

"Some one has already come between us," she said, gently. "The one I have in mind is the Cort Bent of Mesa City, who used to help me gather columbines; who rode with me far up the trail to get the last ray of the sunset when the valley below was already asleep in the shadow; who shouted my name in the gorge because he said it was sweet to hear the mountains send back its echoes all silvered over with the mystery of the Infinite; who told me of palaces and gardens in lands which I had never seen, and of the talented men and women who had lived in them; who sang to me in the moonlight and taught me to dream ——"

"Don't, Camilla ——"

"That was a boy I remember, who lived years and years ago when I was rich — rich in innocent visions which he did nothing to destroy. It was he who gave me an idea that there were men who differed from those I had known before — men in whose hearts was tenderness and in whose minds one might find a mirror for one's harmless aspirations toward a life that wasn't all material and commonplace. He was my knight, that boy, thoughtful, considerate, and gentle. He was foolish sometimes, but I loved him because his ideals had not been destroyed."

"I lied to you. Life is a cinder."

She shook her head. "No, you did not lie to me — not then. Later you did when you asked me

to come to New York. Oh, I know. I can see more clearly now. Suppose that even now I chose what you call your solution of the tangle we've made of things. You'd like to see Jeff desert me for Rita Cheyne so that you could have your own way with me now."

"Camilla! I was mad then. I thought you understood. Gretchen and I ——"

"I understand many things better than I did," she interrupted. "You were no more mad then than you are now. I think I have always been willing to forgive you for that. I wanted to forgive you because I thought perhaps you didn't know what you were saying. But you make it harder for me now. The boy I knew in the West is dead, Cortland. In his place rides a man I do not know, a man with a shadow in his eyes, a man of the gay world, which moves along the line of least resistance, with little room in his heart for the troubles of the woman he once offered to protect with his life."

"I would still protect you — that is what I am offering."

"How? By making me a woman like Rita Cheyne, who changes her husbands as though they were fashions in parasols. You offer me protection from Jeff. I refuse it." And then she added a little haughtily, "I'm not sure that I need any protection."

He glowered toward her, searching her face sullenly.

"You love him?" he muttered.

She smiled a little proudly. "I can't love you both. Jeff is my husband."

"You love him?" he repeated. "Answer me!"

"Not when you take that tone. I'll answer you nothing. Come, we had better ride forward." And, before he could restrain her, she had urged her horse into a canter.

"Camilla!" he called.

But before he could reach her she had joined the others, outside the gates of Braebank.

CHAPTER X

TRITON OF THE MINNOWS

MR. JANNEY'S breakfast guests had gone, and, having seen the last of the country wagons depart, he went into the office next to the smoking room, where Cornelius Bent sat awaiting him. Curtis Janney brought a sheaf of telegrams and letters which he laid on the desk. Then he opened a humidor, offered his guest a cigar, took one himself, and sat down.

"Well, what did you hear?" asked General Bent. Janney took a puff or two at his cigar, then frowned at the papers on the table.

"A great deal," he muttered, "both bad and good. I have here reports for the whole week from our men in Denver, Pueblo, Kinney, and Saguache. The pressure from Abington and the Chicago and Utah has finally brought Noakes into line. It was something of a job, for he's tied up in one of Wray's development companies, and it has cost some money. Abington had to give him a big bonus for the stock in the Denver and Western. Collins and Hardy came around all right, and it only remains to put the screws on to make Wray show his hand."

"Have you decided on that?" asked the General.

"No, I haven't."

Curtis Janney took up a letter which he had separated from the others.

"You remember we thought his planning this new line to Pueblo was financial suicide and that, if we gave Wray enough rope, he'd hang himself. We didn't even see the use of throwing the usual impediments in the way."

Bent nodded.

"Well, they're building it."

"It's only a bluff."

"I'm not so sure. My last reports show that the money is in the treasury — some of it is Wray's, but most of it has come from Utah, California, and Washington even. The Denver and California is backing the whole project, and tent towns are springing up along the line of the survey. Those people out there believe in Wray and are following him like sheep."

"They wouldn't follow him long if we found a way to stop him," said the General grimly. "I've seen those stampedes before, but they always come to an end. What does Lamson report?"

"The Denver and California seems set on this thing — the more so as it promises to be a success without much help from them."

General Bent got up and paced the floor with quick, nervous strides.

"Why, Curtis," he said, "you seem to see un-

usual trouble in the way. The case presents no greater difficulties than the Seemuller plant did, or the Myers and Ott, but we got them both in the end."

"There is a difference."

"Where?"

"The man himself. He'll fight to the last ditch. That jaw wasn't given him altogether as an ornament. I'm sorry we can't find his weak point. A man who looks as far ahead as he does is a good one to tie to."

"But he may not want any strings on him. The other night at dinner at my house he was boasting of his independence. He didn't know how hot it made me."

"Yes, he did. That's why he did it. He said the same thing here yesterday. But I wasn't deceived. It was all a part of his game. I think in a game of bluff he can make old gamesters like you and me sit up and do some guessing." Janney knocked the ash from his cigar and laughed.

"Cornelius, our fine scheme hasn't worked out — not so far. When Wray first came in the office, you sized him up as a social climber. But, if you think we are going to bewilder him by our clubs, the opera, and social connections, you're reckoning without your host."

General Bent smiled tolerantly.

"He assimilates surprisingly well," he said with a reflective nod. "For all his Western manner, he never gives the impression of being ill-at-ease.

I'll say that for him. Why, do you know, I strolled in on Caroline the other afternoon on my way uptown and found him teaching her how to play pinochle."

"Mrs. Rumsen?"

"Yes. She'll be making him the rage before the winter is out. But he takes it all as a matter of course. Indeed, I think he fancies himself our equal in any matter." He paused and then rose. "But he must prove that. The Amalgamated must own that smelter."

"Oh, yes," said Janney, following him with his eyes. "It will, of course. We can't have him underbidding us. It's lucky he hasn't tried it yet. But that's the danger from a man with both ability and ambition. And we can't run the risk of letting him get too far."

There was a silence of some moments, which Cornelius Bent improved by running over the correspondence. When he had finished he tossed the letters abruptly on the table, and walked to the window. "Poor Cort," he muttered, "he lost us the whole thing. I wonder what's the matter with that boy. He always seems to miss it somehow. I can never make a business man of him — like you or myself — or like Jeff Wray."

"He's cost us a pretty penny," growled Janney.

The General still stood by the window, his chin deep in his chest, his long fingers twitching behind his back.

"Jeff Wray must pay for that, Curtis. If we

can't beat him in one way we must choose another. Jeff Wray stole the 'Lone Tree.' He trespassed on our property in the dead of the night, did violence to one of our employes, and bluffed Cort into signing that lease. If there was any law in the state of Colorado, he'd be serving his term at Cañon City. But I'll get him yet! I will, by God! If he'd come in this office now and hold you up for the money in your safe he'd be a thief. What is the difference?"

"Just this: He was successful, and he left no loose ends behind him."

"I've thought at times, Janney, that you lack some interest in this fight."

"Why? Because I take the precaution to get all the information I can—and because my information turns out to be unfavorable to our plans? You want to crush Wray. Very well. I have no objections. Crush him if you can. But it would hardly do to let him crush *us*."

Bent turned and examined his host curiously. Then he laughed. It wasn't pretty laughter, and it cracked dryly, like the sound of a creaking door.

"Upon my word, Curtis, you amaze me," he said.

"Very well," put in Janney coolly. "But think it over. Don't be hasty. If he puts that road through and starts the game of underbidding on the raw product, we'll be in for a long fight — and an expensive one. I don't think the Company wants that now. McIntyre doesn't, I know. And Warrington, as usual, is for temporizing."

"Temporizing?" Cornelius Bent's jaws snapped viciously. "This is not a case where personal preferences can be considered. There's a great principle involved. Are we going to let an upstart like Jeff Wray — a petty real estate operator from an obscure Western town—come into our field with a few stolen millions and destroy the plans of an organized business which controls the output of practically all the great gold-producing states — a company whose sound methods have brought order out of chaos, have given employment to an army of people; whose patents have simplified processes, reduced the cost of production, and kept the price of the metal where it is satisfactory both to the mines and the market? Are we going to see all this jeopardized by a wild-catter, a tin-horn gambler, a fellow with neither decency nor moral principle? Temporize like Warrington if you like, but the Board of the Amalgamated must make a fight for the Wray smelter — or accept my resignation."

Bent stalked the floor swiftly, biting off the ends of his sentences as though they were parts of Wray's anatomy, clenching his fingers as he might have done had they encircled Wray's neck. Curtis Janney followed him with his gaze, his brows tangled and his lips compressed, aware of the seriousness of the situation. The resignation of Cornelius Bent from the Board of the Amalgamated was a contingency not for a moment to be considered.

"That, of course, is impossible," he said. "We're all behind you to a dollar if you take *that* stand. But

wouldn't it be wise to have Wray in and talk to him? We might learn something that's not on the cards."

"Oh, yes, if you like," growled the General, "but you're wasting time. I've got my idea of what that property is worth. I'll make him the offer. If he refuses" — and his lower jaw worked forward — "it will be war — to the last ditch."

Curtis Janney pressed a bell, and a servant appeared.

"Has Mr. Wray returned?"

"Yes, sir," said the man.

"Tell him General Bent would like to see him here."

The man departed, and General Bent with an effort relaxed the muscles of his face and sat. Both gentlemen looked up quickly when the servant returned a few moments later.

"I delivered your message, sir," he said. "Mr. Wray asked me to say that he is engaged at the present moment and will join you later."

General Bent's brows drew together angrily, but Janney inquired suavely, "Where did you find him, Carey?"

"In the conservatory, sir, with Mrs. Cheyne."

Janney smiled, but suppressed Bent's sudden exclamation with a wave of the hand.

"You may bring in the whisky, then tell him that General Bent and I will await his convenience."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"Confound his impudence!" muttered the General, biting at his lip.

"All for effect, Cornelius," said Janney. "That fellow is an artist. He's saving his face for the ordeal."

"Let him save his neck," sneered Bent.

Janney stretched his legs forward and smoked comfortably. "Break it if you like, Cornelius," he said. "I can't, you know, so long as he's my guest."

Wray sauntered in some moments later, accompanied by Rita Cheyne. General Bent looked up with a scowl, which the lady's gay assurance failed to dismiss.

"May I come in, too?" she asked. "I'm wild to hear how big men talk business. Won't you let me, Cousin Cornelius? I'm positively thirsty for knowledge — business knowledge. You don't mind, do you, Mr. Janney?"

"You can't be interested."

Wray laughed, "I'm the original woolly Western lamb being led to the shearing, Mrs. Cheyne ——"

"The golden fleece!" she put in. "I know. But I'm not going to allow it. You're not going to let them — are you, Jeff Wray?"

"I never knew a lamb that had any opinions on the matter," he said easily.

The General got to his feet testily.

"Rita, this won't do at all. We wanted to speak to Wray privately ——"

"Oh! You needn't mind me. I'm positively

bursting with other people's confidences. But I'm really the soul of discretion. Please let me stay." She went over to Curtis Janney and laid her hands on his shoulders appealingly. "I'll sell you Jack-in-the-Box if you will, Mr. Janney," she said. "You know you've wanted that horse all season."

Janney laughed. "That's a great temptation — but this isn't my affair," and he glanced at General Bent, who stood frowning at them from the window.

"Leave the room at once, Rita!" said the General sternly. "You're interfering here. Can't you see ——?"

Mrs. Cheyne dropped her hands.

"Oh, if you take that tone, of course." She moved toward the door, turning with her hand on the knob — "I think you're horrid — both of you. I hope your lamb turns out to be a lion, and eats you up." And, with a laugh and a toss of her head, she went out, banging the door behind her.

Jeff Wray and Curtis Janney laughed, but the frown on General Bent's face had not relaxed for an instant. When the door had closed he sat down in his chair again, while Janney offered cigars. Jeff took one with a sudden serious air, meant perhaps as a tribute to the attitude and years of his fellow guest.

Curtis Janney, looking from one to the other, searched each face for signs of doubt or indetermination and found in each the same deeply set eyes, straight brow, firm, thin mouth, square jaw, and heavy chin which he recognized as belonging

to those of this world who know how to fight and who do not know when they are beaten. Wray's features were heavier, the lines in the General's face more deeply bitten by the acid of Time, but their features were so much alike that, had Janney not known the thing was impossible, it might have been easy to imagine some kind of collateral or even more intimate family relationship.

"You asked me to come here," said Wray, easily apologetic. "What can I do for you, General Bent?"

Bent's deeply set eyes were hidden under his bushy eyebrows, but the lips which held his cigar were flickering in a smile.

"Yes," he began with a slow, distinct enunciation, which Wray recognized at once as belonging to his office downtown, "I thought we might talk a little business, if Mr. Janney doesn't object."

"Not in the least," said Janney, "but there's no reason why we shouldn't mix in a little of the Old Thorne," and he handed the decanter to Wray. Cornelius Bent refused.

"Wray," he went on, "we've been talking about your plant down in the Valley. From all we've been able to find out, it's a pretty good proposition in a small way. But the Amalgamated Reduction Company has no special interest in acquiring it. That mountain range, in our judgment, will never be a big producer. The 'Lone Tree' is the kind of an exception that one finds only once in a lifetime."

"And yet we're running on full time," said Wray, with an odd smile. "If the other mines keep up their promise we won't need to buy any more ore, General."

"The mountains of the West are full of holes that once were promising, Wray — like notes of hand — but they've long since gone to protest."

Jeff's chin tipped upward the fraction of an inch. "*I'm* endorsing these notes, General. Besides," he added suavely, "you know I'm not overanxious to sell. When I came into your office it was only with the hope that I might establish friendly relations. That, I'm glad to say, I succeeded in doing. Your health, Mr. Janney."

General Bent refused to be disarmed. "Yes, I know. But friendship and business are two things. Commercially you are in the attitude of a rival of the company I represent. Of course" — opulently — "not a serious rival, but one who must logically be considered in our plans. We didn't like your building that smelter, and you could have brought your ore at a fair price to one of our plants in Pueblo or Colorado Springs."

"Yes — but that interfered with my own plans," said Jeff. "And I have had them a long time."

"It's a little late to talk about that," assented Bent. "The plant is there, the mines are there, and ——"

"Yes. But I don't see how they need bother you. Most of the gold we send to market comes

from the 'Lone Tree.' I haven't handled any ore below your prices — not yet."

There was, if possible, the slightest accent on the last words, but Wray uttered them with a sweet complacency which failed to deceive. This young fool was threatening — actually threatening the mighty Smelting Trust. It was so preposterous that General Bent actually laughed — a thing he seldom did below Twenty-third Street or when he talked business elsewhere.

"No," he said grimly. "I'm glad that didn't seem necessary. It would have been a pity. See here, Wray" — he leaned forward, his face drawn in decisive lines — "let's get to the point. We've both been dodging it very consistently for a month. You've got some property that may be useful to us. We've thought enough about it at least to make a few inquiries about the whole situation — and about you. We could take that plant under our own management and do a little better than you could. I don't think the location really warrants it — for the big mine may stop paying any day and the railroad facilities, you'll admit, are not of the best. But, if you're willing to sell out at a moderate figure, we might buy it. Or, perhaps, you'd like to come in with us and take stock in the Company. We think a good deal of your ability. There isn't any doubt that you could make yourself useful to us if you chose."

"Thanks," said Jeff, with a sip at his Scotch, and then looked out of the window. He had caught

the meaning of General Bent's casual remark about the railroad facilities.

"Of course," Bent went on, "I don't care to show improper curiosity about your plans, but if you are willing to meet me in a friendly spirit we might reach an agreement that would be profitable both to your companies and mine."

"I'd rather think it was interest than curiosity," said Wray with a smile. "But, unfortunately, I haven't got any plans — further than to get all the ore I can out of 'Lone Tree' and to keep my works busy. Just now I'm pretty happy the way things are going. I've screwed the lid down, and I'm sitting on it, besides — with one eye peeled for the fellow with the screw driver."

Cornelius Bent controlled his anger with difficulty. His equality with Jeff, as a guest of Curtis Janney, gave Wray some advantages. The easy good nature with which he faced the situation and his amused indifference to the danger which threatened him put the burden of proof on the General, who experienced the feelings of an emperor who has been jovially poked in the ribs by the least of his subjects. This was *lèse majesté*. Wray was either a fool or a madman.

"Has it never occurred to you, Wray," snapped Bent, "that somebody might come along *with an axe?*"

"Er — no. I hadn't thought of that," he replied quietly.

"Well, think it over. It's worth your while."

"Is this a declaration of war?"

"Oh, no," hastily, "merely a movement for peace."

Wray took a few puffs at his cigar and looked from Janney to the General, like a man on whom some great truth had suddenly dawned.

"I had no idea," he said, with a skillfully assumed expression of wonder, "that the Amalgamated was so desperately anxious as this."

In drawing aside the curtain, he had still managed to retain his tactical advantage. Both older men felt it — Bent more than Janney, because it was he who had shown their hand, while Wray's cards were still unread.

The natural response was tolerant amusement, and both of them made it.

"Anxious?" laughed Bent. "Is the lion anxious when the wolf comes prowling in his jungle? Success has twisted your perspective, my dear Wray. The Amalgamated is not anxious — it has, however, a natural interest in the financial health of its competitors."

"But I'm *not* a competitor. That's just the point. I'm governed by *your* methods, *your* plans, *your* prices. I've been pretty careful about that. No, *sir*, I know better than to look for trouble with the Amalgamated."

"One moment, Wray," put in Janney; "we don't seem to be getting anywhere. Let's simplify matters. We can get along without your plant,

but if we wanted to buy, what would you want for it?"

"Do you mean the smelter — or all my interests in the Valley?" asked Wray quickly.

"The smelter, of course — and the Denver and Saguache Railroad."

"I don't care to sell — I've got other interests — my Development Company, the coal mines and lumber — they're all a part of the same thing, Mr. Janney, like the limbs of my body — cut one off, and I might bleed to death."

"We could give you traffic agreements."

"I'd rather not. I'll sell — but only as a whole — gold mines, coal, lumber, and all."

Wray caught General Bent's significant nod.

"That is my last word, gentlemen," he concluded firmly.

There was a silence, which Cornelius Bent broke at last.

"And what is your figure, Mr. Wray?" he asked.

Jeff Wray reached for the match box, slowly re-lit his cigar, which emitted clouds of smoke, through which presently came his reply. "You gentlemen have been kind to me here in New York. I want you to know that I appreciate it. You've shown me a side of life I never knew existed. I like the West, but I like New York, too. I want to build a house and spend my winters here — I wasn't figuring on doing that just yet — but if you really want my interests I'll sell them to you — without

reservation — every stick and stone of them for thirty millions."

"Thirty millions?"

The voices of both men sounded as one, Janney's frankly incredulous — Bent's satirical and vastly unpleasant.

"Thirty millions!" Bent repeated with a sneer. "Dollars or cents, Mr. Wray?"

Jeff turned and looked at him with the innocent and somewhat vacuous stare which had learned its utility in a great variety of services. Jeff only meant it as a disguise, but the General thought it impudent.

"Dollars, sir," said Jeff coolly. "It will pay me that — in time."

"In a thousand years," roared the General. "The Amalgamated doesn't figure on millenniums, Mr. Wray. We don't want your other interests, but we'll buy them — for five million dollars — in cash — and not a cent more. You can sell at that price or —" the General did not see, or refused to see, the warning glance from Janney — "or be wiped off the map. Is that clear?"

"I think so, sir," said Wray politely. "Will you excuse me, Mr. Janney?" and bowed himself out of the room.

CHAPTER XI

DISCORD

THAT afternoon late, Berkely and the Wrays returned to town, and the Western wires tingled with Jeff's telegrams to Pueblo, Kinney, and Mesa City. He had burnt his bridges behind him, and, like a skillful cavalry leader, was picking out the vantage points in the enemy's country. The answers came slowly, but Wray had planned his campaign before he left the West, and the messages were satisfactory. He realized that his utility in New York, for the present at least, was at an end, and he saw that he must soon leave for the West to repair any possible break in his line of communications.

Camilla learned of his intended departure with mingled feelings. Her husband's rather ostentatious deference to Mrs. Cheyne had annoyed her. She knew in her heart that she had no right to cavil or to criticise, and pride forbade that she should question him. Larry's presence at dinner precluded personal discussions, and Camilla sat silent while the men talked seriously of Jeff's business plans. It had not been her husband's habit to discuss his affairs with her, and, when the coffee was served, he asked her coolly if she wouldn't rather be alone.

"Do you mind if I stay, Jeff?" she asked. "I'd like to hear, if you don't mind."

"I'd rather you wouldn't. You can't be interested in this — besides, the matter is rather important and confidential."

She got up quickly. Larry Berkely, who had caught the expression in her eyes, opened the door for her and followed her into the drawing room.

"Don't be annoyed, Camilla," he whispered. "Jeff is worried. You understand, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I understand," she replied wearily. "Don't mind me."

As the door closed behind him she stood irresolute for a moment, then suddenly realized she had been up since dawn and was very tired. Her body ached, and her muscles were sore, but the weariness in her mind was greater than these. The closing of the dining-room door had robbed her of the refuge she most needed. She wanted to talk — to hear them talk — anything that would banish her own thoughts — anything that would straighten out the disorderly tangle of her late impressions of the new life and the people she had met in it. She had never thought of Jeff as sanctuary before, and yet she now realized, when the support of his strength was denied her, that in her heart she had always more or less depended upon him for guidance.

And yet she feared him, too. A while ago she had been filled with horror at his share in the "Lone Tree" affair, and since that time the knowledge had

haunted her. But she had not dared to speak of it to him. She felt instinctively that this was one of the matters upon the other side of the gulf that had always yawned with more or less imminence between them. Their relations were none too stable to risk a chance of further discord. The difference in his manner which she had noticed a week or more ago had become more marked, and to-night at the dinner table he had troubled less than usual to disguise his lack of interest in her opinions. The image of Cort was ever in her mind, and the danger that threatened her seemed no less distant than before, and yet she still hoped, as she had always done, that something would happen — some miracle, some psychological crisis which would show her husband and herself the way to unity. Since she had seen Cortland Bent, she had lost some faith in herself, gained some fear of Jeff, whose present attitude she was at a loss to understand, but she still clung desperately to the tattered shreds of their strange union, though lately even those seemed less tangible. To-night, when she had asked him to take her West with him, he had refused her impatiently — almost brusquely.

She went into her own rooms slowly and undressed. As she sat before her mirror, the sight of the scratch on her face recalled the incidents of the day. Mrs. Cheyne! Her lips drew together, her brows tangled in thought, and she dismissed her maid, who had come in to brush her hair. What right had Jeff to ignore her as he had done? No matter what her

own shortcomings, in public, at least, she had always shown him a proper respect and had never in her heart dishonored him by an unworthy thought. For one brief moment in Cortland Bent's arms she had been swept from the shallows into deeper water, but even then she had known, as she knew now, that loyalty to Jeff had always been uppermost in her thoughts. They must have an understanding before he went away. She would not be left here in New York alone. She had learned to distrust herself, to distrust Jeff, Cort, and all the charming irresponsible people of the gay set into which they had been introduced.

In her dressing gown she sat before her fire and listened to the murmur of voices in the drawing room, from which she had been banished. She could hear Jeff's steps as he rose and paced the floor, his voice louder and more insistent than Larry's. There was a coming and going of pages delivering and receiving telegrams, and she felt the undercurrent of a big crisis in Jeff's career — the nature of which she had only been permitted to surmise. His attitude had wounded her pride. It hurt her that Larry should see her placed in the position of a petitioner. Her one comfort was the assurance that she did not care what Jeff himself thought of her, that it was her pride which insisted on a public readjustment of their relations.

Camilla got up, slowly, thoughtfully, and at last moved to the bell determinately.

To her maid she said, "Tell Mr. Wray I'd like to see him before he goes out."

When Wray entered the room later, a frown on his face, the cloud of business worry in his eyes, he found Camilla asleep on the divan under a lamp, a magazine on the rug beside her, where it had fallen from her fingers. His lips had been set for short words, but when he saw her he closed the door noiselessly behind him. Even sleep could not diminish the proud curve of the nostrils, or change the firmly modeled chin and the high, clearly penciled brows. Jeff looked at her a moment, his face showing some of the old reverence — the old awe of her beauty.

And while he looked, she stirred uneasily and murmured a name. He started so violently that a chair beside him scraped the floor and awoke her.

"I must have — oh — it's you, Jeff ——"

"You wanted to see me?" he asked harshly.

"Yes — I ——" She sat up languidly. "I did want to see you. There are some things I want to talk about — some things I want explained. Sit down, won't you?"

"I — I haven't much time."

"I won't keep you long. You've decided to go West — without me?"

"Yes, next week. Perhaps sooner if ——"

"I want you to change your mind about taking me with you."

"Why?"

"I want to go."

Jeff laughed disagreeably. "You women are funny. For a year you've been telling me that the only thing you wanted was a visit to New York. Now you're here, you want to go back. I've told you to get all the clothes you need, hired you an apartment in the best hotel, given you some swell friends, bought you jewelry ——"

"I don't want jewelry, or clothes, or friends," she insisted. "I want to go back and watch them build 'Glen Irwin.'"

"They've stopped working on 'Glen Irwin.' I wanted the money that was going into that."

"Oh!"

"I've a big fight on, and I need all the capital I can swing. 'Glen Irwin' will have to wait," he finished grimly.

"Of course — I didn't understand. But it makes no difference. I can stay at the hotel or at Mrs. Brennan's."

"After all this? Oh, no, you'd be miserable. Besides, I have other plans."

"You don't want me?"

"No. I'll be very busy."

"No busier than you were before we came here."

Jeff paced the length of the room and returned before he answered her.

"See here, Camilla. You ought to know by this time that when I say a thing I mean it. I'm going West alone to do some fence-building. You're to stay here and do the same thing — socially.

I need these people in my business, and I want you to keep on good terms with them."

She gazed thoughtfully at the fire. "Don't you believe me when I say I want to go with you?"

Jeff made an abrupt movement. "Well — hardly. We've always got along pretty well, so long as each of us followed our own pursuits. But I think you might as well acknowledge that you don't need me — haven't needed me now or at any other time."

"I do need you, Jeff. I want to try and take a greater interest in your affairs — to help you if I can, socially if necessary, but I'd rather do it with you than alone."

"I may not be gone long — perhaps only a week or so. In the meanwhile, you're your own mistress."

"You've always let me be that. But I have reasons for wanting to leave New York."

Wray turned and stared at her blankly. "Reasons?"

"Yes. I — I'm a little tired. The life here is so gay. I'm unused to it. It bewilders me."

"I think I understand," he said slowly. "But it can't be helped. I want you to cultivate the McIntyres, the Warringtons, and the Rumsens. Larry will stay here in the hotel for a while. You can call on him."

She fingered the pages of a book beside her. "Then this is final?" she asked.

"Yes — you must do as I say."

He had never before used that tone with her. The warm impulse that had sought this interview was dried at its source. "Very well — I'll stay," she said coldly, "no matter what happens."

He examined her shrewdly.

"You're afraid?" he asked. "That's too bad. I thought I was doing you a service."

"What do you mean?"

"Cort Bent. That's what I mean. Cort Bent. He's yours. I give him to you."

"Jeff!"

She rose and faced him, trembling, and her eyes flickered like a guttering candle, as she tried to return his look. "How could you?" she stammered. "How could you speak to me so?"

But he was merciless. "Oh, I'm not blind, and I'm not deaf, either. I've seen and I've heard. But I didn't need to see or to hear. Don't you suppose I've always known you married me out of spite — out of pique, because Cort Bent wouldn't marry you. I knew it then just as I know it now, but I hoped I could win you back and that things would be the same as they were before *he* came meddling in my affairs. Well, you know what happened better than I do. Our marriage has been a failure. I was a fool — so were you. We've made the best of a bad job, but that don't make it a good job. I let you go your own way. I've been good to you because I knew I'd been as big a fool as you were. What I didn't know was that you'd met Cort Bent behind my back ——"

"That is not true," she broke in. "That day he called here ——"

"Don't explain," impatiently, "it won't help matters. I'm not blind. The main fact is that you've seen Cort Bent again and that you're still in love with him. These people are talking about you."

"Who? Mrs. Cheyne?"

"Yes, Mrs. Cheyne — and others."

Camilla steadied herself with a hand upon the table. The brutality of his short, sharp indictment unnerved her for the moment. She had hoped he would have given her the opportunity to make an explanation in her own way, a confession even which, if he had willed, might have brought them nearer in spirit than they had ever been. But that was now impossible. Every atom of him breathed antagonism — and the words of her avowal were choked in the hot effusion of blood which pride and shame sent coursing to her throat and temples.

"And if I *am* still in love with him," she said insolently, "what then?" He looked at her admiringly, for scorn became her.

"Oh, nothing," he said with a shrug. "Only be careful, that's all. Back in Mesa City I thought of shooting Cort Bent, but I found a better way to punish him. Here" — he laughed — "I've a different plan. I'm going to give you a free foot. I'm going to throw you two together — to give you a chance to work out your salvation in your own way. Your marriage to me means nothing to you. Time

has proved that. You and I are oil and water. We don't mix. We never have mixed. There isn't any reason that I can see that we're ever going to mix. We've worried along somehow, to date, but it's getting on my nerves. I'd rather we understood each other once and for all. I'm past changing. You knew what I was — a queer weed, a mongrel. I took root and I grew as Nature made me grow, in the soil I fell in, hardy, thick-ribbed, stubborn, and lawless. The world was my enemy, but I fought it as Nature taught, by putting on a rough bark and spines like the cactus that grew beside me. Oh, I grew flowers, too, pretty pale blossoms that tried to open to the sun. You had a chance to see them — but they weren't your kind. You looked beyond them at the hot-house plants ——"

"Don't, Jeff," she pleaded. "I can't bear it."

But he only laughed at her.

"Well, I've brought them to you — the roses, the orchids, the carnations, and you're going to live with them, in the atmosphere you've always wanted ——"

"Won't you let me speak?"

"No!" he thundered. "My mind is made up. I'm going West alone. You go your way. I go mine. Is that clear? You and Cortland Bent can meet when and where you please."

"I don't want to meet him," she whispered brokenly. "I don't want to see him again."

"I can't believe you," he sneered. "We've lived a lie since we were married. Let's tell the truth

for once in our lives. When I came in this room you were asleep, but even while you slept you dreamed of him and his name was in your mouth."

The face she turned up to him was haggard, but her eyes were wide with wonder.

"I heard you — you were calling for Cort. I'm not going to be a fool any longer."

He turned away from her and went toward the door, while she got up with some dignity and walked to the fireplace.

"You're going — to Mrs. Cheyne?" she asked coldly.

"If I like," defiantly. "This game works both ways."

"Yes, I see. There's some method in your madness after all."

"I don't see why you should care — since I don't object to Bent. Mrs. Cheyne is a friend of mine. She's investing in my company ——"

"Evidently," with scorn. "No doubt you make it profitable to her."

"We won't talk about Mrs. Cheyne. You don't like her. I do. You like Cort Bent. I don't. And there we are. We understand each other. It's the first time in our lives we ever have. I don't question you, and you're not to question me. All I ask is that you hide your trail, as I'll hide mine. I have some big interests at stake, and I don't want any scandal hanging around my name — or yours. I'm giving you into the hands of my enemies. The father wants to ruin my business,

the son to ruin my wife. I'll fight General Bent with his own weapons. The son ——"

"You're insulting," she broke in. "Will you go?"

He turned at the door — his face pale with fury.

"Yes, I'll go. And I won't bother you again. These rooms are yours. When I'm here, mine are there. Some day when I'm ready I'll get you a divorce. Then you can marry as you please. As for me," he finished passionately, "I'm done with marriage — done with it — you understand?"

And the door crashed between them.

Camilla stood for a moment, tense and breathless, staring wide-eyed at the pitiless door. Then the room went whirling and she caught at the chair at her desk and sank into it helplessly, one hand pressed against her breast. For a moment she could not think, could not see even. The brutality of his insults had driven her out of her bearings. Why he had not struck her she could not imagine, for it was in the character of the part he was playing. He had not given her a chance. He must have seen that she was trying to repair past damages and begin anew. A throb of self-pity that was almost a sob came into her throat. Tears gathered in her eyes and pattered on the desk before her. She did not notice them until she heard them fall, and then she dried her eyes abruptly as though in shame for a weakness. He did not want to begin anew. She could see it all clearly now. He was tired of her and caught at the easiest way to be rid of her, by putting her in the wrong. Her strength came

quickly as she found the explanation, and she sat up rigidly in her chair, her face hot with shame and resentment. She deserved something better from him than this. All that was worst in her clamored for utterance.

With a quick movement of decision she reached forward for a pen and paper and wrote rapidly a scrawl, then rang the bell for her maid.

"Have this note mailed at once."

It was addressed to Cortland Bent.

CHAPTER XII

TEA CUPS AND MUSIC

DROPPING in on Jack Perot meant being shot skyward for twelve stories in a Louis Sixteenth elevator operated by a magnificent person in white gloves and the uniform of a Prussian lieutenant. Perot's panelled door was no different from others in the corridor upstairs, except for its quaint bronze knocker, but the appearance of a man-servant in livery and the glimpse of soft tapestries and rare and curious furniture which one had on entering the small reception room gave notice that a person of more than ordinary culture and taste dwelt within. The studio of the painter itself was lofty, the great north window extending the full height of two stories of the building, while the apartment beyond, a library and dining room with steps leading above to the bedrooms, contained all the luxuries that the most exacting bachelor might require.

To arrive at the distinction of being a fashionable portrait painter one must have many qualifications. In the schools one must know how to draw and to paint from the model. In the fashionable studio one must know how to draw and paint — then discover how not to do either. If the nose of one's

sitter is too long, one must know how to chop it off at the end; if the mouth is too wide, one must approximate it to the Greek proportions; eyes that squint must be made squintless and colorful; protruding ears must be reduced. Indeed, there is nothing that the beauty doctor professes to accomplish that the fashionable portrait painter must not do with his magic brush. He must make the lean spinster stout and the stout dowager lean; the freckled, spotless; the vulgar, elegant; the anæmic, rosy; his whole metier is to select agreeable characteristics and to present them so forcibly that the unpleasant ones may be forgotten, to paint people as they ought to be rather than as they are, to put women in silk who were meant for shoddy, and men in tailored coats who have grown up in shirt-sleeves.

In addition to these purely technical attainments, he must be an infallible judge of character, a diplomat, a sophist; he must have a silver tea-service, to say nothing of excellent Scotch and cigarettes. He must be able to write a sonnet or mix a salad, discuss the Book of Job or the plays of Bernard Shaw, follow the quotations of the stock market, the news of the day, and the fashions in women's hats. He must laugh when he feels dejected and look dejected when he feels like laughing. Indeed, there is nothing the fashionable portrait painter must not be able to do, except perhaps really — to paint.

Jack Perot could even do that, too, when he

wanted to. The sketch of the Baroness Charny on his easel was really sincere — an honest bit of painting done with the freedom his other work lacked. Perhaps this was because it was not a commission, but just one of those happy interludes which sometimes occur amid the dreariest of measures. It pleased him, at any rate, and he stood off from it squinting delightedly through his monocle while the Baroness poured the tea.

"Really, madame, it's too bad it's finished. I was almost ready to believe myself back in Paris again," he said in French. "If one could only live one's life backward!"

"Oh, that wouldn't do — in a little while perhaps you would be quite poor."

"Yes," he sighed, "but think how much better I would paint." He stopped before the sketch and sighed again. "I think it's you, Baroness. You bring an echo of my vanished youth. Besides, I didn't paint you for money. That is the difference."

"You are going to paint that handsome Madame Wray?"

"Yes. She's coming in for tea to-day."

"They are wonderful, those people. He is so original — so *farouche*."

"He's too fond of talking about himself," he growled. "These people represent the Western type so common in New York — climbers — but New York will forgive much in the husband of Mrs. Wray."

"He doesn't care whether he's forgiven or not, does he?"

"That's a pose. All Westerners adopt it. To consent to be like other people would be to confess a weakness."

"I like him; but then" — the Baroness yawned politely —"all Americans are attractive. Mrs. Wray I find less interesting."

"Naturally, madame. You are a woman." Then, after a pause, "It is a pity she's getting herself talked about."

"Really? That's encouraging — with Monsieur Bent?"

"Oh, yes — they met in the West — the phenix of an old romance."

"How delightful! Monsieur Jeff doesn't care?"

"Oh, no," significantly. "He has his reasons."

The door-knocker clanged, and Mrs. Rumsen entered, escorting two débutantes, who paused on the threshold of the studio gurglingly, their eyes round with timidity and a precocious hopefulness of imminent deviltries.

"*So* kind of you, Mrs. Rumsen. Good morning, Miss Van Alstyne — Miss Champney" (with Jack Perot it was always morning until six of the afternoon). "You've met the Baroness?"

"How too thweetly perfect!"

"How fearfully interesting!"

The newcomers fluttered palpitantly from canvas to canvas and only subsided when Mrs. Cheyne entered.

"Am I welcome?" she drawled. "This *is* your day, isn't it, Jack? Oh, how charming!" She

paused before the sketch of the Baroness. "Why didn't you paint *me* like that? I'll never forgive you. You were painting me for Cheyne, I know it. My portrait fairly exudes the early Victorian."

Perot kissed the tips of his fingers and wafted them toward her. "Quite correct, dear Rita. Cheyne was paying the bill. Now if you gave me another commission ——"

"I won't — you're the most mercenary creature. Besides, I'm too hard up. One must really have billions nowadays." She sank on the couch beside the Baroness. "It's really very exhausting — trying to live on one's income. I'm very much afraid I shall have to marry again."

"You need a manager. May I offer ——"

"No, thanks. I shall be in the poor-house soon enough."

"Get Mr. Wray to help," laughed the painter mischievously. "They say he has a way of making dollars bloom from sage-brush."

She glanced at him swiftly, but took her cup of tea from the Baroness and held her peace.

The knocker clanged again, and Mrs. Wray, Miss Janney, Larry Berkely, and Cortland Bent came in.

"This is really jolly, Gretchen. Hello! Cort, Berkely — Mrs. Wray, I've been pining to see your hair against my old tapestry. Oh! shades of Titian! Can I ever dare?"

Camilla colored softly, aware of Mrs. Cheyne's sleepy eyes in the shadow below the skylight. She

nodded in their general direction and then took Mrs. Rumsen's proffered hand — and the seat beside her.

"I was so sorry to have missed you this morning," she said. "I'm always out, it seems, when the people I want to see come in."

"I should have 'phoned," said the lady. "I had something particular to speak to you about. Is your husband coming here?"

"I — I really don't know," Camilla stammered. "He has been away and very busy."

"He'll be back for my dance, won't he?"

"I think so — but he's never certain. He's going West very soon."

"He was telling me something about his early life. You ought to be very proud of him."

"I — I am."

"I can't tell just what it is, but to me your husband seems like an echo of something, an incarnation of some memory of my youth — perhaps only a long-forgotten dream. But it persists — it persists. I can't seem to lose it."

"How very curious."

"It is the kind of personality one isn't likely to forget. Has he any memory of his father or — of his mother?"

"No. His mother died when he was born. His father — he doesn't remember his father at all."

Mrs. Rumsen smiled. "Forgive me, won't you? I suppose you'll think me a meddlesome old busybody. But I'm not, really. I want to be friendly.

You're a stranger in New York, and it occurred to me that perhaps you might crave a little mothering once in a while. It is so easy to make mistakes here, and there are so many people who are willing to take advantage of them."

"You're very kind, Mrs. Rumsen. I'm glad you think us worth while."

"I do. So much worth while that I want to lay particular stress upon it. Perhaps I ought to tell you what I mean. Last night my brother dined with us. He was in a very disagreeable mood — and spoke very bitterly of your husband. I suppose he may even go so far as to carry his business antagonism into his social relations with you both."

"How very unfortunate!" in genuine dismay.

"That is his way. He's rather used to lording it over people here. And people stand it just because he's Cornelius Bent. I suppose Mr. Wray knows what he is about. At any rate, I honor him for his independence. I told my brother so — and we're not on speaking terms."

As Camilla protested she laughed. "Oh, don't be alarmed, dear; we have been that way most of our lives. You see we're really very much alike. But I wanted you to understand that my brother's attitude, whatever it is, will make no possible difference to me."

"I shouldn't dare to be a cause of any disagreement ——"

"Not a word, child. I'm not going to permit Wall Street to tell me who my friends shall be.

There is too much politics in society already. That is why I want you to dine with me before my ball, and receive with me afterward, if you will."

Camilla's eyes brightened with pleasure. "Of course, I'm very much honored, Mrs. Rumsen. I will come gladly, if you don't think I'll add fuel to the flame."

"I don't really care. Why should you?"

"There are reasons. The General was most kind to us both ——"

"Because he had something to get out of you," she sniffed. "I could have told you that before."

"But it was through General Bent that we met everybody — people who have entertained us — the Janneys, the McIntyres, and yourself, Mrs. Rumsen."

"He was the ill-wind that blew us the good," she finished graciously. "Say no more about it. I have a great many friends in New York, my child — some who are not stockholders in the Amalgamated Reduction Company."

* * * * *

In another corner of the studio — a dark one behind a screen — Miss Janney had impounded Larry Berkely.

"Have you seen 'Man and Super-man'?" she was asking.

"I've read it."

"Well, do you believe in it? Don't you think it breeds a false philosophy? Can you imagine a girl so brazen as to pursue a man whether he wanted her or not?"

"No. It was very un-human," said Larry.

"Or a man so helpless, saying such dreadful things — thinking such dreadful things about a girl and then marrying her?"

"It was absurd — quite ridiculous in fact. No one ever meets that kind of people in real life. I never could stand a girl of that sort."

"Oh, I'm so glad you agree with me. Do you know, Larry, I really believe that you and I have exactly the same way of thinking about most things. It's really remarkable. I'm so glad. It's a great comfort to me, too, because ever since I first met you I hoped we'd learn to understand each other better."

"How curious! I've been hoping the same sort of thing — fearing it, too," he added dolefully.

"Fearing it? What do you mean? Tell me at once."

"Oh, nothing," he murmured.

"I insist on knowing."

"I wanted you to like me — and yet I dreaded it, too."

"Don't say that again," she whispered. "I can't stand it, Larry. I do care for you — more and more every time I see you. But it makes me terribly unhappy to feel that anything is bothering you."

"It needn't bother *you*."

"Yes, it does — if it makes *you* miserable. What is it? Won't you tell me?"

"I — I don't think we ought to be too friendly."

"Why not?" in surprise.

"Because it wouldn't be good for you — for either of us."

"That's no answer at all. I refuse to listen. What do I mind if it's good for me or not — if I care for you enough to — to — what is it, Larry? Answer me."

"Well, you know I'm all right now, but when I went West my bellows — my breathing apparatus — oh, hang it all! The reason I went West was on account of my health. My lungs, you know ——"

"You silly boy. I've known that for *ever* so long. That's one of the reasons why I fell in love with ——"

She stopped, the color suddenly rushing to her cheeks as she realized what she had been saying. But Larry's fingers had found hers in the corner, and she looked up into his eyes and went on resolutely. "I do love you, Larry. I think I always have. Are you glad?"

Then Larry kissed her.

* * * * *

On the other side of the screen, to her own accompaniment on the piano, the Baroness Charny began singing:

"Tes doux baisers sont des oiseaux
Qui voltigent fous sur mes lèvres,
Ils y versent l'oubli des fièvres
Tes doux baisers sont des oiseaux,
Aussi légers que des roseaux,
Foulés par les pieds blancs des chèvres
Tes doux baisers sont des oiseaux
Qui voltigent fous, sur mes lèvres."

Amid the chorus of approval, as the Baroness paused, a thin little lisping voice was heard.

"Oh, how too utterly thweetly exthquithite!

I never thought of kitheth being like the flight of little birdth. Are they, Mr. Bent? I thought they lathted longer."

Bent shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "How should *I* know, Miss Champney? *I've* never been married."

"Married? How thilly! Of courthe not! It would be thtupid to kith *then* — tho unneth-eth — unneth-eth — oh, you know what I mean, don't you?"

"I'm afraid I don't. I'd be tempted not to understand, just to hear you say 'unnecessary' again."

"Now you're making fun of me. You're perfectly horrid. *Ithn't* he, Mr. Perot?"

"He's a brute, Miss Champney — an utter brute; that's because he's never been kissed."

"Oh, how very interethting! Haven't you really, Mr. Bent? Oh, you're really quite hopeleth."

Mrs. Cheyne sipped her tea quite fastidiously and listened, bored to the point of extinction. Nor did her expression change when, some moments later, Jeff Wray was announced. Camilla's face was the only one in the room which showed surprise. She had not seen her husband for several days, and she noticed, as he came over and spoke to Mrs. Rumsen, that he looked more than ordinarily tired and worried. With Camilla he exchanged a careless greeting and then passed her on his way to the others. The servant brought the decanter and soda bottle, and he sank on the divan by the side of Rita Cheyne. It surprised him a little when she

began talking quite through him to their host and the Baroness, whom they were asking to sing again.

It was a *Chanson Galante* of Bemberg

"A la cour
A la cour
Aimer est un badinage
Et l'amour
Et l'amour
N'est dangereux qu'au village
Un berger
Un berger
Si la bergere n'est tendre
Sait se prendre
Sait se prendre
Mais il ne saurait changer.
Et parmi nous quand les belles
Sont legeres ou cruelles,
Loin d'en mourir de depit
On en rit, on en rit,
Et l'on change aussi-tot qu'elles."

Jeff listened composedly and joined perfunctorily in the applause. Rita Cheyne laughed.

"Charming, Baroness. I'm so in sympathy with the sentiment, too. It's delightfully French."

"What is the sentiment?" asked Jeff vaguely of any one.

Mrs. Cheyne undertook to explain.

"That love is only dangerous to the villager, Mr. Wray. In the city it's a joke — it amuses and helps to pass the time."

"Oh!" said Jeff, subsiding, conscious that the question and reply had been given for the benefit of the entire company.

"Rather dainty rubbish, I should say," said Perot, with a sense of saving a situation (and a client).

"Love is less majestic in the village — that's all, but perhaps a little sweeter. Ah, Baroness!"— he sighed tumultuously —"Why should you recall — these memories?"

The conversation became general again, and Wray finished his glass and set it down on the edge of the transom.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Cheyne?" he asked. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Why should I be?" coolly.

"I don't know. I thought you might be. I stopped at your house. They told me you were here, so I came right down."

"You're very kind — but I didn't leave any instructions."

"No, but they told me. I wanted to see you."

"You didn't want to see me the other night."

"I couldn't — I 'phoned you."

"Don't you think it would have been in better taste if you had come yourself?"

"I left in the morning for Washington. I've just returned. I'm sorry you didn't understand."

"I did. You had other fish to fry. Did you know I came all the way in from the country to see you? No woman cares to throw herself at the head of a man. Personally I prefer an insult to a slight, Mr. Wray."

"Good Lord! I hope you don't think I could do that. I certainly have never showed you anything but friendship. I've been worried over — over business matters."

"That's a man's excuse. It lacks originality. I'm not accustomed to rebuffs, Mr. Wray. I made the mistake of showing that I liked you. That's always fatal. I thought you were different. I know better now. There's no depth too great for the woman who cheapens herself — I'm glad I learned that in time."

"Don't talk like that. I tell you I've been away," he protested.

"Really! Why didn't you write to me then?"

"Write?"

"Or send me some roses?"

"I'll send you a wagon-load."

"It's too late," she sighed. "It was the thought I wanted."

Wray rubbed his chin pensively. It occurred to him that there were still many things with which he was unfamiliar.

"I did think of you."

"Why didn't you tell me so then?"

"I'm telling you now."

She leaned toward him with a familiar gesture of renewed confidences.

"There are a thousand ways of telling a woman you're thinking of her, Mr. Wray. The only way *not* to tell her is to *say* that you are. What a man says is obvious and unimportant. A woman always judges a man by the things that he ought to have done — and the things he ought not to have done."

"I don't suppose I'll ever learn ——"

"Not unless some woman teaches you."

"Won't you try me again?"

"I'll think about it." And then with one of her sudden transitions, she added in a lower tone, "I am at home to-night. It is your last chance to redeem yourself."

"I'll take it. I can't lose you, Mrs. Cheyne."

"No — not if I can help it," she whispered.

A general movement among Perot's visitors brought the conversation to a pause. Mrs. Rumsen, after a final word with Camilla, departed with her small brood. Cortland Bent, with a mischievous intention of supplying evidence of the inefficacy of the parental will, removed one wing of the screen which sheltered Berkely and his own ex-fiancée. But Miss Janney was not in the least disconcerted, only turning her head over her shoulder to throw at him:

"Please go away, Cort. I'm extremely busy."

Camilla smiled, but was serious again when Bent whispered at her ear, "*My* refuge!" he said. "*Yours* is yonder."

She followed his glance toward Wray and Rita Cheyne, who were so wrapped in each other's conversation that they were unconscious of what went on around them.

"Come," said Camilla, her head in the air, "let us go."

CHAPTER XIII

GOOD FISHING

A CLOCK struck the hour of nine. Mrs. Cheyne lowered the volume of Shaw's plays, the pages of which she had made a pretence of reading, and frowned at the corner of the rug. She now wore a house gown of clinging material whose colors changed from bronze to purple in the shadow of the lamps. It fitted her slim figure closely like chain-mail and shimmered softly like the skin of a dusky chameleon. Mrs. Cheyne was fond of uncertain colors in a low key, and her hour was in the dim of twilight, which lent illusions, stimulated the imagination to a perception of the meaning of shadows — softened shadows which hung around her eyes and mouth, which by day were merely lines — a little bitter, a little hard, a little cynical. Mrs. Cheyne's effects were all planned with exquisite care; the amber-colored shades, the warmish rug and scarlet table cover, the Chinese mandarin's robe on her piano, the azaleas in the yellow pots, all were a part of a color scheme upon which she had spent much thought. Her great wealth had not spoiled her taste for simplicity. The objects upon her table and mantel-shelf were few but choice, and their

arrangement, each with reference to the other, showed an artistry which had learned something from Japan. She hated ugliness. Beauty was her fetich. The one great sorrow of her life was the knowledge that her own face was merely pretty; but the slight irregularity of her features somewhat condoned for this misfortune, and she had at last succeeded in convincing herself that the essence of beauty lies rather in what it suggests than in what it reveals. Nature, by way of atoning for not making each feature perfect, had endowed them all with a kind of Protean mobility, and her mind with a genius for suggestion, which she had brought to a high degree of usefulness. Without, therefore, being beautiful at all, she gave the impression of beauty, and she rejoiced in the reputation which she possessed of being marked "Dangerous."

She had rejoiced in it, moreover, because she had been aware that, no matter how dangerous she might prove to be with others, with herself she had not been dangerous. The kind of romance, the kind of sentiment, in which she indulged she had come to regard as highly specialized art in which she was Past Grand Mistress. She loved them for their own sake. She was a fisher of men, but fished only for the love of fishing, and it was her pleasure while her victims still writhed to unhook them as tenderly as might be and let them flap ungracefully back into their own element. Her fly-book was a curiosity and of infinite variety. Izaak Walton advances the suggestion that trout

bite "not for hunger, but wantonness." Rita Cheyne was of the opinion that men bit for a similar reason; and so she whipped the social streams ruthlessly for the mere joy of the game, matching her skill to the indifference of her quarry, her artistry to their vehemence.

And now she suddenly discovered that she must throw her fly-book away — she had tried them all — the "silver-doctor," the "white moth," the "brown hackle" — and all to no purpose. Her fish had risen, but he would not bite. She was fishing in unfamiliar waters, deeper waters, where there were hidden currents she could not understand. The tackle she had used when fishing for others would not serve for Jeff Wray.

It provoked her that her subtlety was of no avail, for she had the true fisher's contempt for heavy tackle. And yet she realized that it was only heavy tackle which would land him. He was the only man who had really interested her in years, and his conquest was a matter of pride with her. She had other reasons, too. His wife was beautiful. Rita Cheyne was merely artistic. Victory meant that Beauty was only an incident — that Art, after all, was immortal. The theory of a whole lifetime needed vindication.

When Wray entered she was deep in "You Never Can Tell," but looked up at her visitor slowly and extended a languid hand.

"Aren't you early?" she asked, slipping a marker in the pages of her book and closing it slowly.

"No, I don't think so. I thought I was late. I was detained."

She held up a hand in protest.

"I was really hoping you might not come. I've been really so amused — and when one is really amused nowadays one should expect nothing more of the gods."

Wray got up hurriedly. "I won't 'butt in' then. I don't want to disturb ——"

"Oh, sit down — do. You make me nervous. Have a cigarette — I'll take one, too. Now tell me what on earth is the matter with you."

"The matter? Nothing. I'm all right."

"You've changed somehow. When I met you at the Bents' I thought you the most wonderful person I had ever met — with great — very great possibilities. Even at the Janneys' the illusion still remained. Something has happened to change you. You do nothing but scowl and say the wrong thing. There's no excuse for any man to do that."

"I'm worried. There's been a slight tangle in my plans. I — but I'm not going to trouble you with ——"

"I want to hear — of course. You went to Washington?"

"Yes — to see some of our congressmen. I have the law on my side in this fight, and I'm trying to make things copperlined — so there can't be a leak anywhere. Those fellows down there are afraid of their own lives. They act as though they were on the lookout for somebody to stab them in

the back. Washington is too near New York. A fellow goes there from the West and in about six months he's a changed man. He forgets that he ever came from God's country, and learns to bow and scrape and lick boots. I reckon that's the way to get what you want here in the East — but it goes against my grain."

"Weren't you successful?"

"Oh, yes, I found out what I wanted to know. It's only a question of money. They'll fall in line when I'm ready. But it's going to take cash — more than I thought it would."

"Are you going to have enough?"

"My credit's good, and I'm paying eight per cent."

"Eight? Why, I only get four!"

"I know. Eight is the legal rate in my state. Business is done on that basis."

"I wish I could help. You know I'm horribly rich. I'd like to look into the matter. Will you let me?"

"Yes, but there's a risk — you see, I'm honest with you. I'll give stock as security and a share in the profits — but my stock isn't exactly like government bonds. Who is your lawyer? I'll put it up to him if you like."

"Stephen Gillis. But he'll do what I say."

"I'd rather you consulted him."

"Oh, yes, I shall. But I have faith in you, Jeff Wray. It seems like a good speculation. I'd like you to send me all the data. I'll really look into it seriously." She stopped and examined

his face in some concern. In the lamplight she saw the lines that worry had drawn there. "But not to-night. You've had enough of business. You're tired — in your mind" — she paused again that he might the better understand her meaning — "but you're more tired in your heart. Business is the least of your worries. Am I right?"

"Yes," he said sullenly.

"I'm very sorry. Is there any way in which I can help?"

"No."

The decision in his tone was not encouraging, but she persevered.

"You don't want help?"

"It isn't a matter I can speak about."

"Oh!"

Her big fish was sulking in the deeps? It was a case for shark-bait and a "dipsy" lead.

"You won't tell me? Very well. Frankness is a privilege of friendship. I'll use it. Your wife is in love with my cousin Cortland."

Wray started violently.

"How do you know?"

She smiled. "Oh, I don't know. I guessed. It's true, though." She paused and examined him curiously. He had subsided in his chair, his head on his breast, his brows lowering.

"Are you unhappy?" she asked.

"No," he muttered at last. "It's time we understood each other."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Do? Nothing," he said with a short laugh. "There's nothing to do. I'm a good deal of a fool, but I know that putting trouble in a woman's way never made her quit going after what she'd set her mind on. If I licked Cort Bent she'd make me out a brute; if I shot him, she'd make *him* out a martyr. Any way, I'm a loser. I'm going my own way and she——" He got up and strode the length of the room and back, and then spoke constrainedly: "I'm not going to speak of this matter to you or to any one else."

He dropped into his chair beside her again and glared at the window curtain. Mrs. Cheyne leaned one elbow on the arm of her chair which was nearest him and sighed deeply.

"Why is it that we always marry the wrong people? If life wasn't so much of a joke, I'd be tempted to cry over the fallibility of human nature. The love of one's teens is the only love that is undiluted with other motives — the only love that's really what love was meant to be. It's perfectly heavenly, but of course it's entirely unpractical. Marrying one's first love is iconoclasm — it's a sacrilege — a profanation — and ought to be prohibited by law. First love was meant for memory only — to sweeten other memories later on — but it was never meant for domestication. Rose petals amid cabbage leaves! Incense amid the smells of an apartment kitchen!"

She sank back in her chair again and mused dreamily, her eyes on the open fire.

"She did not struggle or resist. It seemed impossible to do so."

"It's a pretty madness," she sighed. "Romance thrives on unrealities. What has it in common with the butcher? You know" — she paused and gave a quick little laugh — "you know, Cheyne and I fell in love at first sight. He was an adorable boy and he made love like an angel. He had a lot of money, too — almost as much as I had — but he didn't let that spoil him — not then. He used to work quite hard before we were married, and was really a useful citizen.

"Matrimony ruined him. It does some men. He got to be so comfortable and contented in his new condition that he forgot that there was anything else in the world but comfort and content — even *me*. He began to get fat and bald. Don't you hate bald-headed men with beards? He was so sleek, shiny, and respectable that he got on my nerves. He didn't want to go anywhere but to symphony concerts and the opera. Sometimes he played quite dolefully on the 'cello — even insisted on doing so when we had people in to dinner. It was really very inconsiderate of him when every one wanted to be jolly. He began making a collection of 'cellos, too, which stood around the walls of the music room in black cases like coffins. Imagine a taste like that! The thing I had once mistaken for poetry, for sentiment, had degenerated into a kind of flabby sentimentality which extended to all of the commonplaces of existence. I found that it wasn't really me that he loved at all. It was *love* that he loved. I had made a similar mis-

take. We discovered it quite casually one evening after dinner."

She broke off with a sigh. "What's the use? I suppose you'll think I'm selfish — talking of myself. Mine is an old story. Time has mellowed it agreeably. Yours is newer ——"

"I'm very sorry for you. But you know that I'm sorry. I've told you so before. I think I understand you better now."

"And I you," and then softly, "Mrs. Wray was your first love?"

"No," he muttered, "she was my last."

Mrs. Cheyne's lids dropped, and she looked away from him. Had Wray been watching her he would have discovered that the ends of her lips were flickering on the verge of a smile, but Wray's gaze was on the andirons.

They sat there in silence for some moments, but Wray, who first spoke, restored her self-complacency.

"You're very kind to me," he said slowly. "You say you like me because I'm different from other fellows here. I suppose I am. I was born different and I guess I grew up different. If you think I'm worth while, then I'm glad I grew up the way I did." He got up and walked slowly the length of the room. She watched him doubtfully, wondering what was passing in his mind. She learned in a moment; for when he approached her again he leaned over her chair and, without the slightest warning, had put his arms around her and kissed her again and again on the lips.

She did not struggle or resist. It seemed impossible to do so, and she was too bewildered for a moment to do anything but sit and stare blankly before her. He was a strange fish — a most extraordinary fish which rose only when one had stopped fishing. It was the way he did it that appalled her — he was so brutal, so cold-blooded.

When he released her she rose abruptly, her face pale and her lips trembling.

"How could you?" she said. "How could you?" And then, with more composure, she turned and pointed toward the door.

"I wish you'd please go — at once."

But as he stood staring at her she was obliged to repeat: "Don't you hear me? I want you to go and not to come back. Isn't that plain? Or would you prefer to have me ring for a servant?"

"No, I don't prefer either," he said with a smile; "I don't want to go. I want to stay here with you. That's what I came for."

She walked over to the door and stood by the bell. "Do you wish me to ring?"

"Of course not."

"Will you go?"

"No."

She raised her hand toward the bell, but halted it in midair. Wray noticed her hesitation.

"Wait a moment. Don't be foolish, Rita. I have something to say to you. It wouldn't reflect much credit on either of us for you to send me out. I thought we understood each other. I'm sorry.

You said once that you liked me because I was plain-spoken and because I said and did just what came into my head, but you haven't been fair with me."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this: You and I were to speak to each other freely of ourselves and of each other. You said you needed me, and I knew I needed you. We decided it was good to be friends. That was our agreement. You broke it wilfully. You have acted with me precisely as you have acted with a dozen other men. It was lucky I discovered my danger in time. I don't think any woman in the world could do as much with me as you could — if you wanted to. When I like anybody I try to show them that I do. If you were a man I'd give you my hand, or loan you money, or help you in business. I can't do that with you. You're a woman and meant to be kissed. So I kissed you."

She dropped her hands. "Yes, you kissed me, brutally, shamelessly ——"

"Shamelessly?"

"You've insulted me. I'll never forgive you. Don't you think a woman can tell? There are other ways of judging a man. I've interested you, yes, because you've never known any real woman before," contemptuously. "I suppose you're interested still. You ought to be. But you can never care for any woman until you forget to be interested in yourself. For you the sun rises and

sets in Jeff Wray, and you want other people to think so, too."

"I'm sorry you think so badly of me."

"Oh, no, I don't think badly of you. From the present moment I sha'n't think of you at all. I — I dislike you — intensely. I want to be alone. Will you please go?"

Wray gave her his blandest stare, and then shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the door.

"You're willing to have me go like this?"

"Yes."

"I'm going West to-morrow."

"It makes no difference to me where you are going."

"Won't you forgive me?"

"No."

As he passed her, he offered his hand in one last appeal, but she turned away from him, her hands behind her, and in a moment he was gone.

Rita Cheyne heard the hall door close behind him and then sank into the chair before the open fire, her eyes staring before her at the tiny flame which still played fitfully above the gray log. Her fish had risen at last with such wanton viciousness that he had taken hook, line, reel, and rod. Only her creel remained to her — her empty creel.

CHAPTER XIV

FATHER AND SON

FATHER and son had dined together alone, and for most of the time in silence. Cornelius Bent had brought his business mien uptown with him, and Cortland, with a discretion borrowed of experience, made only the most perfunctory attempts at a conversation. Since the "Lone Tree" affair there had happened a change in their relations which each of them had come to understand. Cortland Bent's successive failures in various employments had at last convinced his father that his son was not born of the stuff of which Captains of Industry are made. The loss of the mine had been the culminating stroke in Cortland's ill-fortune, and since his return to New York he had been aware of a loss of caste in the old man's eyes. General Bent had a habit of weighing men by their business performances and their utility in the financial enterprises which were controlled from the offices of Bent & Company. It was not his custom to make allowances for differences in temperament in his employees, or even to consider their social relationships except in so far as they contributed to his own financial well-being. He had accustomed himself for many years to

regard the men under him as integral parts of the complicated machinery of his office, each with its own duty, upon the successful performance of which the whole fabric depended. He had figured the coefficient of human frailty to a decimal point, and was noted for the strength of his business organization.

To such a man an only son with incipient leanings toward literature, music, and the arts was something in the nature of a reproach upon the father himself. Cort had left college with an appreciation of Æschylus and Euripides and a track record of ten-seconds flat. So far as Bent Senior could see, these accomplishments were his only equipment for his eventual control of the great business of the firm of which his father was the founder. The Greek poets were Greek, indeed, to the General, but the track record was less discouraging, so Cortland began the business of life at twenty-three as a "runner" for the bank, rising in time to the dignity of a post inside a brass cage, figuring discounts, where for a time he was singularly contented, following the routine with a cheerfulness born of desperation. As assistant to the cashier he was less successful, and when his father took him into his own office later and made him a seller of bonds, Cortland was quite sure that at last he had come into his own. For the selling of bonds, it seemed, required only tireless legs and tireless imagination — both of which he possessed. Only after a month he was convinced that bond sellers are born — not made.

The General, still hoping against hope, had now taken him back into his office on a salary and an interest in business secured, and thus made his son more or less dependent upon his own efforts for the means to enjoy his leisure. Father and son existed now as they had always done, on a basis of mutual tolerance — a hazardous relation which often threatened to lead and often did lead to open rupture. To-night Cortland was aware that a discussion of more than usual importance was impending, and, when dinner was over, the General ordered the coffee served in the smoking room, the door of which, after the departure of the butler, he firmly closed.

General Bent lit his cigar with some deliberation, while Cortland watched him, studying the hard familiar features, the aquiline nose, the thin lips, the deeply indented chin, wondering, as he had often wondered before, how a father and son could be so dissimilar. It was a freak of heredity, Nature's little joke — at Cornelius Bent's expense. The General sank into his armchair, thoughtfully contemplating his legs and emitting a cloud of smoke as though seeking in the common rite of tobacco some ground of understanding between his son and himself.

"I want to speak to you about the Wrays," he said at last.

Cortland's gaze found the fire and remained on it.

"You are aware that a situation has arisen within the past few weeks which has made it im-

possible for Bent & Company or myself personally to have any further relations, either financial or social, with Jeff Wray? He has taken a stand in regard to his holdings in Saguache Valley which I consider neither proper nor justifiable. To make short of a long matter, I thought it best some weeks ago to forget the matter of the mine and make Wray an offer for his entire interests in the Saguache Valley. It was a generous offer, one that no man in his position had a right to refuse. But he did refuse it in such terms that further negotiations on the subject were impossible."

"Yes, sir, I know," put in his son.

"Wray's rise is one of those remarkable combinations of luck and ability — I'll concede him that — which are to be found in every community once in a decade. From obscure beginnings — God knows what the fellow sprang from — he has worked his way up in a period of three years to a position of commanding influence. He owns the biggest independent smelter in the West — built it, we now believe, with the intention of underbidding the Amalgamated. He has not done so yet because he hasn't been sure enough of himself. But he's rapidly acquiring a notion that nothing Jeff Wray can do will fail. That is his weak point — as it is with every beggar on horseback. You are familiar with all of these facts. You've had some occasion," bitterly, "to form your own judgment of the man. When you came East I was under the impression that, aside from busi-

ness, there were other reasons why you disliked him."

"That is correct, sir," muttered Cortland, "there were."

The General eyed his son sharply before he spoke again.

"Am I to understand that those reasons still exist? Or ——"

"One moment, sir. I'd like to know just where this conversation is drifting. My relations with Wray have never been pleasant. He isn't the type of man I've ever cared much about. No conditions that I'm aware of could ever make us friendly, and, aside from his personality, which I don't admire, I'm not likely to forget the 'Lone Tree' matter very soon."

"H — m! That still rankles, does it? It does with me — with all of us. Oh, I'm not blaming you, Cort. If you had been a little sharper you might have made one last investigation before you signed those papers. But you didn't, and that's the end of that part of the matter. What I want to know now is just what your relations with the Wray family are at the present moment. You hate Wray, and yet most of your leisure moments are spent in the company of his wife. Am I to understand ——?"

"Wait a moment, sir ——" Cortland had risen and moved uneasily to the fireplace. "I'd prefer that Mrs. Wray's name be kept out of the discussion. I can't see how my relations with her can have any bearing ——"

"They have," the General interrupted suavely. "If Mrs. Wray is to receive your confidences I can't give you mine."

"Thank you," bitterly. "I didn't know I had ever done anything to warrant such an attitude as this."

"Tut! tut! Don't misunderstand me. Whatever your sins, they've always been those of omission. I don't believe you'd betray me wilfully. But intimacies with pretty women are dangerous, especially intimacies with the wives of one's financial enemies; unless, of course, there's some method in one's madness."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm sorry I don't make my intention clear. If your friendship with Mrs. Wray can be useful to Bent & Company I see no reason why it shouldn't continue. But if it jeopardizes my business plans in any way, it's time it stopped. In my office you are in a position and will, I hope, in the near future be in a further position to learn all the business plans of the Amalgamated and other companies. Of course, I don't know how far Mrs. Wray enjoys the business confidences of her husband. But it is safe to assume that, being a woman, she knows much more than her husband thinks she does. I don't intend that you should be placed in an embarrassing position with respect to her or with respect to me. I'm on the point of starting the machinery of my office on a big financial operation for the Amalgamated Reduction Company — the

exact nature of which until the present moment has remained a secret. Your part in this deal has been mapped out with some care, and the responsibilities I have selected for you should give you a sense of my renewed faith in your capabilities. But you can't carry water on both shoulders ——"

"You're very flattering, sir. I've never carried much water on either shoulder; and my relations with Mrs. Wray hardly warrant ——"

"I can't see that," impatiently. "You're so often together that people are talking about you. Curtis Janney has spoken to me about it. Of course, your affair with Gretchen is one that you must work out for yourselves, but I'll confess I'm surprised that she stands for your rather obvious attentions to a married woman."

Cortland Bent smiled at the ash of his cigar. His father saw it and lost his temper.

"I'm tired of this shilly-shallying," he snapped. "You seem to make a practice in life of skating along the edge of important issues. I'm not going to tolerate it any longer, and I've got to know just where you stand."

"Well, dad," calmly, "where shall we begin? With Gretchen? Very well. Gretchen and I have decided that we're not going to be married."

"What?"

"We have no intention of marrying next year or at any other time."

"Well, of all the ——! Curtis Janney doesn't know this."

"He should. Gretchen is in love with somebody else, and I ——"

"*You!* I understand. You are, too. You're in love with Jeff Wray's wife."

He paused, but his son made no reply, though the old man watched his face curiously for a sign. The General knocked his cigar-ash into the fire.

"Is that true?"

"Under the circumstances I should prefer not to discuss the matter."

"Why? You and I haven't always been in sympathy, but the fact remains that I'm your father." The old man's long fingers clutched the chair arm, and he looked straight before him, speaking slowly. "I suppose you've got to have your fling. I did. Every man does. But you're almost old enough to be through that period now. There was never a woman in the world worth the pains and anxieties of an affair of this kind. A woman who plays loose with one man will do it with another. The fashion of making love to other men's wives did not exist when I was young."

Cortland turned to the fire, his lips compressed, and with the tongs replaced a fallen log.

"When I was young," the old man went on, "a man's claim upon his wife was never questioned. Society managed things better in those days. Ostracism was the fate of the careless woman; and men of your age who sought married women by preference were denied the houses of the young girls of their own condition. If a fellow of your

type had oats to sow, he sowed them with a decent privacy instead of bringing his mother, his sister, into contact ——"

Cortland straightened up, the tongs in his hand, his face pale with fury, saying in stifled tones:

"For God's sake, stop, or I'll strike you as you sit."

The General moved forward in his chair almost imperceptibly, and the cigar slipped from his fingers and rolled on the hearth. For a long moment the two men looked into each other's eyes, the elder conscious that for the first time in his life he had seen his son really aroused. There was no fear in the father's look, only surprise and a kind of reluctant admiration for a side of Cortland's character he had never seen. He sank back into his chair and looked into the fire.

"Oh!" he muttered.

"You had no right to speak of Mrs. Wray in those terms," said Cortland, his voice still quivering.

"I'm sorry. I did not know."

Cortland set down the fire tongs, his hands trembling, and put both elbows on the mantelshelf.

"Perhaps, since you know so much," he said in a suppressed voice, "I had better add that I would have married her if Wray hadn't."

"Really? You surprise me."

There was a moment of silence which proved to both men the futility of further discussion.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather we didn't speak

of this. Mrs. Wray would understand your viewpoint less clearly than I do. She is not familiar with vice, and she does not return my feeling for her. If she did, I should be the last person in the world she would see——"

"I can't believe you."

"It is the truth. Strange as it may seem to you and to me, she loves her husband."

"She married him for his money."

Cortland was silent. Memory suddenly pictured the schoolroom at Mesa City where he had won Camilla and lost her in the same unfortunate hour — his hour of mistakes, spiritual and material — a crucial hour in his life which he had met mistily, a slave of the caste which had bred him, a trifler in the sight of the only woman he could love, just as he had been a trifler before the world in letters and in business.

"No," he replied. "She did not marry him for money. She married him — for other reasons. She found those reasons sufficient then — she finds them sufficient now." He dropped heavily, with the air of a broken man, into an armchair, and put a hand over his eyes as though the light hurt them. "Don't try to influence me, sir. Let me think this out in my own way. Perhaps, after what you've told me about the Amalgamated, I ought to let you know."

"Speak to me freely, Cort," said the old man more kindly.

"I don't want you to think of Camilla as the

wife of Jeff Wray. I want you to think of her as I think of her — as herself — as the girl I knew when I first went West, an English garden-rose growing alone in the heart of the desert. How she had taken root there Heaven only knows, but she had — and bloomed more tenderly because of the weeds that surrounded her."

He paused a moment and glanced at his father. General Bent had sunk deep in his chair, his shaggy brows hiding his deeply set eyes, which peered like those of a seer of visions into the dying embers before him. A spell seemed to have fallen over him. Cortland felt for the first time in his life that there was between them now some subtle bond of sympathy, unknown, undreamed of, even. Encouraged, he went on.

"She was different from the others. I thought then it was because of the rough setting. I know now that it wasn't. She is the same here that she was out there. I can't see anything in any other woman; I don't want to see anything in any other woman. I couldn't make her out; it puzzled me that I could do nothing with her. After school hours — she was the schoolmistress, you know, sir — we rode far up into the mountains. She got to be a habit with me; then a fever. I didn't know what was the matter except that I was sick because of the need of her. I didn't think of marriage then. She was nothing. Her father kept a store in Abilene, Kansas. I thought of you. All my inherited instincts, my sense of class

distinction, of which we people in New York make such a fetich, were revolted. But I loved her, and I told her so."

Cortland sat up, then leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, and followed his father's gaze into the fire.

"She was too clean to understand me, sir. I knew it almost before I had spoken. In her eyes there dawned the horror, the fear, the self-pity which could not be said in words. Then Jeff Wray came in and I left her — left Mesa City. There was — nothing else — to do."

His voice, which had sunk to a lower key, halted and then was silent. A chiming clock in the hallway struck the hour; other clocks in dainty echo followed in different parts of the house; an automobile outside hooted derisively; but for a long while the two men sat, each busied with a thread of memory which the young man had unreeled from the spool of life. In the midst of his thoughts Cort heard a voice at his elbow, the voice of an old man, tremulous and uncertain, a softer voice than his father's.

"It is strange — very, very strange!"

"What is strange, sir?"

Cornelius Bent passed his fingers before his eyes quickly and straightened in his chair.

"Your story. It's strange. You know, Cort, I, too, once loved a woman like that—the way you do. It's an old romance — before your mother, Cort. Nobody knows — nobody in the East ever knew — even Caroline ——"

He stopped speaking as though he had already said too much, got up slowly and walked the length of the room, while Cortland watched him, conscious again of the sudden unusual sense of conciliation in them both. At the other end of the room the General stood a moment, his hands behind his back, his gaze upon the floor.

"I am sorry, Cort," he said with sudden harshness. And then, after a pause, "You must not see Mrs. Wray again."

Cortland's hands clenched until the knuckles were white, and his eyes closed tightly, as though by a muscular effort he might rob them of a persistent vision. When he spoke his voice was husky like that of a man who had been silent for a long time.

"You're right, sir — I've thought so for some days. But it's not so easy. Sometimes I think she needs me ——"

"Needs you? Don't they get along?"

"I don't know. There are times when I feel that I am doing the right sort of thing."

"He doesn't abuse her?"

"I don't know. She'd be the last person to speak of it if he did. But I think she doesn't altogether want me to go."

General Bent shook his head slowly. "No, Cort. It won't do. What you've just told me makes your duty very clear — your duty to her and your duty to yourself. There's danger ahead — danger for you both. You may not care for my advice — we've

not always understood each other — but I hope you'll believe me when I say that I offer it unselfishly, with the single purpose of looking after your own welfare. Leave New York. I'm prepared to send you West next week, if you'll go. There will be a lot of work for us all. It's possible that I may go, too, before long. I can give you duties which will keep you busy so that you won't have time to think of other things. When I first spoke to you of this business to-night I spoke as President of the Amalgamated Reduction Company, now I am speaking to you as a father. I want you with us more than ever — largely on our account, but more largely now upon your own. Will you go?"

Cortland rose and leaned one elbow on the mantel.

"You want me to help you in the fight for Wray's smelter?"

"Yes, I do."

"Don't you want me to see her again?"

"It's wiser not to. No good can come of it — perhaps a great deal of harm."

"She would not understand — she knows I dislike her husband, but it seems to me I ought to tell her ——"

"That you're making financial war upon her husband? Forewarn him — forearm him? What else would you say. That doesn't seem fair to me, does it?"

He paused, watching his son narrowly and yet

with a kind of stealthy pity. Cortland's struggle cost him something.

"I suppose you're right," he said at last. And then, turning around toward his father, "I will not see her again. Give me the work, sir, and I'll do my best. Perhaps I haven't always tried to do that. I will, though, if you give me the chance."

"Your hand on it, Cort. I won't forget this. I'm glad you spoke to me. It hasn't always been our custom to exchange confidences, but I'll give you more of mine if you'll let me. I'm getting old. More and more I feel the need of younger shoulders to lean on. I'm not all a business document, but the habit of mercilessness grows on one downtown. Mercy has no place in business, and it's the merciful man that goes to the wall. But I have another side. There's a tender chord left in me somewhere. You've struck it to-night, and there's a kind of sweetness in the pain of it, Cort. It's rusty and out of use, but it can still sing a little."

Cortland laid his hand on the old man's shoulder almost timidly, as he might have done to a stranger.

"You'll forgive me, father ——?"

"Oh, that" — and he took his son's hand — "I honor you for that, my son. She was the woman you loved. You could not hear her badly spoken of. Perhaps if I had known my duty — I should have guessed. Say nothing more. You're ready to take my instructions?"

"Yes — and the sooner the better."

"Very good. You'll hear more of this to-morrow.

I am — I'm a little tired to-night. I will see you at the office."

Cortland watched him pass out of the door and listened to his heavy step on the broad staircase. Cornelius Bent was paying the toll of his merciless years.

When he was gone, Cortland sank into the big chair his father had vacated, his head in his hands, and remained motionless.

CHAPTER XV

INFATUATION

THE season was at its height. The Rumsen ball, the Warringtons' dinner-dance, and some of the subscription affairs had passed into social history, but a brilliant season of opera not yet half over and a dozen large dances were still to follow. Camilla sat at her desk assorting and arranging the cards of her many visitors, recording engagements and obligations. When Jeff had left for the West she had plunged into the social whirlpool with a desperation born of a desire to forget, and, as she went out, there had come a bitter pleasure in the knowledge that, after all, she had been able to win her way in New York against all odds. People sought her now, not because she was a protégée of Mrs. Worthington Rumsen, or because she was the wife of the rich Mr. Wray, but because she was herself.

The dangers which threatened no longer caused her any dismay, for ambition obsessed her. It was an appetite which had grown great with feeding, and she let it take her where it would. There was not an hour of the day when she was not busy — in the mornings with her notes and her shopping, in the afternoons with luncheons, teas, and other smart

functions, at night with dinners, the theatre, or the opera and the calendared dances. There were few opportunities for her to be alone, and the thought of a reconciliation with her husband, which had at one time seemed possible, had been relegated to her mental dust-bin in company with an assorted lot of youthful ideals which she had found it necessary to discard.

She could not remember the day when she had not been socially ambitious. Five months ago, before she and Jeff had quarreled, there had been a time when she had been willing to give up the world and go back with him. She had been less ambitious at that moment than ever before in her life. If he had taken her with him then, there might still have been time to repair their damages and begin life on a basis of real understanding. For a brief time she had abhorred the new life he had found for her, had hated herself for the thing that she really was, a social climber, a pariah — too good for her old acquaintances, not good enough for her new ones— a creature with a mission of intrusion, a being neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring, and yet perhaps something of all three. But that period of mental probation had passed. She no longer felt that she was climbing. There were many broken rungs below her on the social ladder, but those above were sound, and her head was among clouds tinted with pink and amber.

Such was the magic of success. She lived in an atmosphere of soft excitements and pleasurable

exhilarations, of compliments and of flattery, of violets and roses. Bridge lessons had improved her game, but she still discovered that the amounts she could lose in a week were rather appalling. Checks for large amounts came regularly from the West, and she spent them a little recklessly, convinced that she was obeying to the letter her husband's injunction to strengthen their social position, no matter what the cost. She had written Jeff twice in the first week after his departure asking if she could not follow him to Mesa City. His replies had been brief and unnecessarily offensive — so that, though his image loomed large at times, pride refused further advances. Cortland Bent had been with her continually and of course people were talking. She heard that from Mrs. Rumsen, who, in the course of a morning of casual "mothering," had spoken to Camilla with characteristic freedom.

"I know there's no harm in his attentions, child," she said, "at least so far as you're concerned. You have always struck me as being singularly capable of looking after yourself — and of course Cort is old enough to know what *he* is about. But it never does any one any good to be talked about — especially a woman who has her way to make in the world. There is a simplicity almost rustic in the way you two young people allow yourselves to be discovered in public places — which, to an ancient philosopher like myself, carries complete conviction of innocence. But others may not be so discerning.

If you were ugly or deformed it wouldn't make the slightest difference what you did, but, being handsome, you are on trial; and every pretty woman in society is on the jury of a court which convicts on circumstantial evidence alone."

Camilla thanked her preceptor for the warning, aware of an unpleasant sense of shock at the revelation. She seemed to have reached a point in her mad infatuation with life where warnings made no impression upon her. She had not seen Cort Bent for several days now, and, while she experienced a vague sense of loss in his absence, which had not been explained, she was so busy that she had not even found time to analyze it.

A belated cold season had set in — a season of snow and ice; and fashionable New Yorkers, in a brief interlude of unimportant engagements, flocked for the week-end to their country places to enjoy a few days of old-fashioned winter weather. The Billy Havilands' farm was within motoring distance of the town. It wasn't much of a place in the modern sense, merely a charming old shingled farmhouse which had been remodeled and added to, set in a big lawn like a baroque pearl in green enamel, surrounded by ancient trees which still protected it with their beneficent boughs. As Haviland and his wife preferred the city in winter and went to their Newport cottage in summer, they only used The Cove for small house parties between seasons. It was kept open for just such occasions as the present one, and Camilla, who

had joined this party at the last moment, was looking forward with enjoyment to a glimpse of winter life in a different sort of community.

Snow had fallen during the night, but the day was cold and clear — one of those dry, sparkling days like the winter ones in Colorado when the Saguache Peak was laid like a white paper-cutting against the turquoise sky, and the trees at timber line were visible in silhouette to the naked eye. It was freezing hard, and Camilla's skin tingled sharply beneath her motor veil, but she lay back in her warm furs beside Dorothy Haviland in the tonneau, drinking deep breaths of delight as she watched the panorama of purple hills across the river. The snow was not too deep for easy going, but in places it had drifted across the road waist high. Rejoicing in the chance to test the metal of his high-powered car, Haviland took these drifts on the high gear, sending a cloud of iridescent crystals over and about his guests, who pelted the unresponsive back of his head with snowballs. Farmers in sleighs and wagons on runners drew aside in alarm, to stare with open mouths at the panting demon — which passed them by before their horses had time to be frightened. Every ride with "Billy" was a "joy" ride — he hadn't driven this car in the Vanderbilt Cup race for nothing. Jack Perot clung to the robe rail, and alternately prayed and swore in Haviland's ear; the Baroness Charny punctuated his remarks with cunning foreign cries, and Dorothy herself admonished him to be careful, but Camilla, whatever she felt, sat quietly

between the two women, her pulses going fast, a prey to the new excitement of speed.

Haviland had 'phoned his orders from the city to have the bobsled sent over to the Country Club — and when they drove through the entrance gates, the pond in the valley below the golf course was dotted with skaters. A blue thread of smoke trailed skyward from the cabin of the Fishing and Skating Club — a part of the larger organization — from which people came and glided forth by twos and threes over the glossy blue surface of the pond.

A surprise awaited the party, for as the motor drew up at the steps of the Golf House it was greeted by a storm of soft snowballs from a crowd ambushed in a snow fort on the lawn. The motor party got out hurriedly, laughing like children, while Billy Haviland, like a good general, marshaled his forces under the protecting bulk of the machine, while they threw off their heavy furs and made snowballs enough to sally forth valiantly to the attack. The battle was short and furious, until Jack Perot and Camilla by a dexterous flank-movement assailed the unprotected wings and came to close quarters with the enemy, Larry, Gretchen, Cortland Bent, and Rita Cheyne. A well-aimed shot by Camilla caught Cortland on the nose, which disconcerted him for a moment, and Haviland improved his opportunity by washing Rita's face in snow. A truce was declared, however, but not before the besiegers had entered the breastworks and given three cheers for their victory.

"I'll never forgive you, Billy," laughed Rita, brushing the snow from her neck. "Never — I'm simply soaking."

"Spoils of victory! You're lucky I didn't kiss you."

"Yes, I am," she said with sudden demureness. "I'd rather have my face washed."

The machine was sent on, and, chatting gaily, the party made its way down to the cabin by the lakeside, a path to which had been cleared through the snow. Camilla glanced at Cortland Bent, who stood silently at her side.

"What's the matter, Cort? Aren't you going to speak to me?" she asked carelessly.

He forced a laugh. "Oh, yes, of course."

"Where have you been? Do you realize that I haven't seen you for the last two days?"

"Four," he corrected soberly. "I — I've been very busy."

"That's no explanation. You're angry?"

"No, not at all. I — thought I'd better not come."

She examined him curiously, and laid her fingers on his arm. "How funny you are? Has anything happened?"

He didn't reply at once, and kept his gaze away from her. "I came here to-day," he said deliberately, "because I thought it would be the one place where you and I wouldn't meet."

"Oh!" and she turned away abruptly, her chin in the air, "I'm sorry. We needn't meet *now*," and she hurried her steps.

But he lengthened his stride and kept pace with her.

"You don't understand —— "

"I don't care to understand. You don't want to see me — that's enough —— "

"Camilla, please —— "

"I'm not in the habit of pursuing the men of my acquaintance, Cort. I'll save you the trouble of avoiding me." And with that she broke away from him and ran down the path, joining the others at the door of the house. His attitude annoyed her more because she couldn't understand it than because of any other reason. What had come over him? They had parted as friends with the definite assurance that they were to meet the next day. She had been busy writing letters then, but she remembered now that he had not called. There was an unaccountable difference in his manner, and he had spoken with a cold precision which chilled her. She felt it in all the sensitive antennæ which a woman projects to guard the approaches to her heart. All that was feminine and cruel in her was up in arms at once against him. He needed a lesson. She must give it to him.

On the ice they met a merry party, and Billy Haviland pointed them all out to Camilla — Molly Bracknell and her diminutive husband, known in clubdom as the "comic supplement"; Jack Archer, the famous surgeon, and his fiancée, who had lost her appendix and her heart at the same time. Stephen Gillis, the lawyer, who was in love with his

pretty client, Mrs. Cheyne, and didn't care who knew it.

"Is he really in love with Mrs. Cheyne?" asked Camilla.

"Oh, yes — threw over a girl he was engaged to. He's got it bad — worse than most of 'em."

"What a pity!"

"Rita's in good form this winter."

"She has a charm for men."

"Dolly says she's a *de luxe* binding of a French novel on a copy of 'Handley Cross.' I guess it's true. But I've always been afraid of Rita."

"Why?"

"She's too infernally clever. She don't like my sort. She likes brainy chaps with serious purposes. They're the kind that always take to her. I think she knows I'm ' wise.' "

They crossed hands, and Camilla resolutely gave herself over to the pleasure of motion. She skated rather badly — a fact to be bewailed, since Rita Cheyne was doing "figure eights" and "corkscrews," but with Haviland's help she managed to make three or four turns without mishap. But she refused to "crack the whip," and skated alone until Cortland Bent joined her. He offered her his hand, but she refused his help.

"Won't you go away please, Cort?"

"I've got to see you to-night, Camilla," he said suddenly. "Where will you be?"

As she wouldn't reply, he took her hand and skated

backward facing her. "You've got to see me, Camilla —— "

"I can't — I won't."

"I'm going away to-morrow."

"We've gotten along for four days without meeting," she said airily. "I think I'll survive."

"You're heartless —— "

"I know it. Please get out of my way."

"No — not until you promise to let me see you."

"You're seeing me now."

He took her firmly by the elbows. "Listen, Camilla! I'm leaving New York to-morrow for a long while — perhaps for good —— "

For the first time she realized the importance of what he was saying and looked up into his eyes, discovering something in their shadows she had not seen before.

"Is it true? Why are you going?"

"That's what I wanted to tell you. May I see you to-night?"

She considered a moment before she replied indifferently.

"Yes, if you like. I am at the Havilands'."

As they stopped before the cabin, Jack Perot joined them, offering to take Camilla for a turn, but she said she was cold, and the three of them went inside to the burning log. Larry and Gretchen on the bench put a space between them rather suddenly.

"Don't move on *our* account, Larry," said Perot

mischievously; "your silhouettes through the window were wonderful — quite touching — in fact."

"Jack!" said Gretchen, her face flaming, "you couldn't *see* —— "

"No, as a matter of fact, we couldn't — because the shades are drawn "— the painter laughed immoderately — "but you know we *might* have."

"You're a very disagreeable person, and I don't like you at all," said Miss Janney. "I'll never let you do my portrait — *never!*"

"Ha! ha!" he cried in accents of Bowery melodrama. "At last, Geraldine, I have you in me cul-lutches. I'm desprit and starving! Next week I paint your portrait — or tell your father! Cha-oose, beautiful one!"

In the laugh which followed Larry joined good-naturedly. Indeed, there was nothing left to do — unless it was to wring the painter's neck. Instead of which, he wrung his hand and whispered, "I wish you would, Perot. It'll save *me* the trouble."

The rest of the crowd appeared after a while, and the steward brought hot Scotches, which detracted nothing from the gayety of the occasion.

"God made the country — man made the town," sighed Billy sententiously, holding the amber liquid to the firelight. "The simple pleasures — the healthy sports of our ancestors! Eh, Rita?"

"Oh, yes," with fine scorn, "quilting parties! No bridge, golf or tennis. Imagine a confirmed

night owl like *you*, Billy, tucked safely in bed at nine."

"I'm often in bed by nine."

"Nine in the morning," laughed Perot. "That's safe enough."

"Don't believe 'em, Camilla. I'm an ideal husband, aren't I, Dolly?"

"I hadn't noticed it."

"Oh, what's the use?" sniffed Mrs. Cheyne. "There's only one Ideal Husband."

"Who?" asked a voice, solicitous and feminine.

"Oh, some other woman's, of course."

"How silly of you, Rita," said Gretchen indignantly. "It's gotten to the point where nobody believes the slightest thing you say."

"That's just what she wants," laughed Cortland. "Don't gratify her, Gretchen."

Mrs. Cheyne shrugged her shoulders, and, with a glance at Camilla, "Now the Ideal Wife, Cort ——"

"Would be my own," he interrupted quickly, his face flushing. "I wouldn't marry any other kind."

"That's why you *haven't* married, Cortland dear," said Rita acidulously.

Camilla listened with every outward mark of composure — her gaze in the fire — conscious of the growing animosity in Mrs. Cheyne. They had met only twice since Jeff's departure, and on those occasions each had outdone the other in social amenities, each aware of the other's hypocrisy. In their polite interchange of compliments Wray's

name had by mutual consent been avoided, and neither of them could be said to have the slightest tactical advantage. But Camilla felt rather than knew that an understanding of some sort existed between Mrs. Cheyne and Jeff — a more complete understanding than Camilla and her husband had ever had. She could not understand it, for two persons more dissimilar had never been created. Mrs. Cheyne was the last expression of a decadent dynasty — Jeff, the dawning hope of a new one. She had taken him up as the season's novelty, a masculine curiosity which she had added to her cabinet of eligible amusements. Camilla's intuition had long since told her of Jeff's danger, and it had been in her heart the night they separated to warn him against his dainty enemy. Even now it might not have been too late — if he would have listened to her, if he would believe that her motive was a part of their ancient friendship, if he would meet her in a spirit of compromise, if he were not already too deeply enmeshed in Rita Cheyne's silken net. There were too many "ifs," and the last one seemed to suggest that any further effort in the way of a reconciliation would be both futile and demeaning.

Camilla was now aware that Mrs. Cheyne was going out of her way to make her relations with Cort conspicuous — permissible humor, had the two women been friendly. Under present conditions it was merely impertinence.

"Mrs. Cheyne means," said Camilla distinctly,

"that the ideal husbands are the ones one can't get." And then, pointedly, "Don't you, Mrs. Cheyne?"

Rita glanced at Camilla swiftly and smiled her acknowledgment of the thrust.

"They wouldn't be ideal," she laughed, "if we ever got them, Mrs. Wray."

"Touchée," whispered Billy Haviland to Larry Berkely, delightedly.

Outside there was a merry jingle of sleighbells, and Mrs. Haviland rose. "Come, children," she said, "that's for us. I wish we had more room at The Cove. You'll come, though, Cort, won't you? We need another man."

"Do you mind if I stay out, Rita?" Cortland appealed.

"Oh, not at all, I'm so used to being deserted for Mrs. Wray that I'm actually uncomfortable without the sensation."

So the party was arranged. A long bobsled hitched to a pair of horses was at the door, and the women got on, while Gretchen pelted snowballs at Perot, and only succeeded in hitting the horses, so that Camilla and the Baroness were spilled out into the snow and the man had a hard time bringing the team to a stop. A pitched battle ensued while the three women scrambled into their places, Cortland and Billy covering the retreat. At last they all got on, and, amid a shower of snowballs which the sledders couldn't return, the horses galloped up the hill and out into the turnpike which led to the Haviland farm.

CHAPTER XVI

OLD DANGERS

CAMILLA had known for some time that she could not forget. She sought excitements eagerly because they softened the sting of memory, and the childish delights of the afternoon with the Havilands, while they made the grim shadow less tangible, could not drive it away. When the idle chatter of small talk was missing, Jeff loomed large. At The Cove she went at once to her room, but instead of dressing she threw herself on the bed and followed the pretty tracery of the wall paper beside her; her eyes only conjured mental pictures of the days in Mesa City before Cortland Bent had come, the long rides with Jeff up the mountain trail when she first began to learn what manner of man he was and what manner of things he must one day accomplish. She seemed to realize now that even in those early days Jeff Wray had stood as a type of the kind of manhood that, since the beginning of time, has made history for the world.

With all his faults, his vulgar self-appreciation, and his distorted ethics, there was nothing petty or mean about him. He was generous, had always been generous to a fault, and there was many a

poor devil of a gambler or a drunkard even in those days who had called his name blessed. He hadn't had much to give, but when he made a stake there were many who shared it with him. Since he had been married his benefactions had been numberless. He never forgot his old friends and, remembering old deeds of kindness to himself, had sought them out — a broken sheep-herder back on the range, a barber in Pueblo who was paralyzed, a cowboy in Arizona with heart disease, a freight brakeman of the D. & W. who had lost a leg — and given them money when he couldn't find work that they could do. She remembered what people in the West still said — that Jeff had never had a friend who wasn't still his friend.

She had often reviled herself because her judgment of all men was governed by the external marks of gentility which had been so dear to her heart — the kind of gentility which Cortland Bent had brought into Mesa City. Gentility was still dear to her heart, but there was a growing appreciation in her mind of something bigger in life than mere forms of polite intercourse. Jack Perot, who was painting her portrait; Billy Haviland, who sent her roses; Douglas Warrington, who rode with her in the park; Cortland Bent — all these men had good manners as their birthright. What was it they lacked? Culture had carved them all with finer implements on the same formula, but what they had gained in delicacy they had lost in force. Jeff might have been done by Rodin, the others by Carrière — Beleuze.

It made her furious that in spite of herself she still thought of Jeff. She got up and went to the mirror. There were little telltale wrinkles about her eyes, soft shadows under her cheek-bones which had not been there when she came to New York. It was worry that was telling on her. She had never yet been able to bring herself to the point of believing that all was over between Jeff and herself. Had she really believed that he was willing to live his future without her, she could not have consented even for so long as this to play the empty part he had assigned her. It was *his* money she was spending, not her own; *his* money which provided all the luxuries about her — the rich apartment in New York, the motor car, *carte blanche* at Sherry's, extravagances, she was obliged to acknowledge, which for the present he did not share. True, she was following implicitly his directions in keeping his memory green in the social set to which he aspired, and she had done her part well. But the burden of her indebtedness to him was not decreased by this obedience, and she felt that she could not for long accept the conditions he had imposed. Such a life must soon be intolerable — intolerable to them both.

It was intolerable now. She could not bear the thought of his brutality, the cruelty of his silence, the pitiless money which he threw at her every week as one would throw a bone to a dog. He was carrying matters with a high hand, counting on her love of luxury and the delights of gratified social ambition to hold her in obedience. He had planned well,

but the end of it all was near. It was her pride that revolted — that Jeff could have thought her capable of the unutterable things he thought of her—the pitiful tatters of her pride which were slowly being dragged from her by the tongue of gossip. Mrs. Rumsen had warned her, and Mrs. Cheyne made free use of her name with Cort's. The world was conspiring to throw her into Cortland's arms. She would not admit that the fault was her own — it was Jeff's. It had always been Jeff's. She had given him every chance to redeem her, but he had tossed her aside—for another. Now she had reached a point when she didn't care whether he redeemed her or not. She felt herself drifting — drifting — she didn't know where and didn't seem to care where.

It was affection she craved, love that she loved, and Cortland was an expression of it. He had always been patient — even when she had treated him unkindly. A whispered word to Cortland ——

Her musing stopped abruptly. What did Cortland mean by avoiding her? And why was he leaving New York? There was a tiny pucker at her brows while she gave the finishing touches to her toilet; but when she went down to dinner her cheeks glowed with ripe color and her eyes were shot with tiny sparkling fires.

"Auction" bridge followed dinner. In the cutting Cort and the Baroness were out of it, and when Cort and the Baroness cut in, Camilla and Perot cut out. Fate conspired, and it was not until late in the evening that Cortland and Camilla found them-

selves alone in the deserted library at the far end of the wing. Camilla sank back into the silk cushions of the big davenport wearily.

"I played well to-night," she said; "I believe even Billy is pleased with me. I *did* have luck, though — shameful luck —— "

She stretched her arms above her head, sighing luxuriously. "Oh, life is sweet — after all."

Cortland watched her.

"Is it?" he asked quietly.

"Don't you think so, Cort?"

"There's not much sweetness left for me in anything. I've got to go away from you, Camilla."

"So you said." And then airily, "Good-by."

He closed his eyes a moment.

"I want you to know what it means to me."

"Then why do it?"

"I — I've thought it all out. It's the best thing I can do — for you — for myself —— "

"I ought to be a judge of that."

His dark eyes sought her face for a meaning.

"It's curious you didn't consult me," she went on. "I hope I know what's best for myself —— "

"You mean that you don't care — my presence is unimportant. My absence will be even less important."

"I do care," she insisted. "What's the use of my telling you. I'll be very unhappy without you."

He shook his head and smiled. "Oh, I know — you'll miss me as you would your afternoon tea if it was denied you — but you'll do without it."

"I'm quite fond of afternoon tea, Cort." And then, more seriously, "Are you really resolved?"

"Yes," he muttered, "resolved — desperately resolved."

She threw herself away from him against the opposite end of the couch, facing him, and folded her arms, her lips closed in a hard line.

"Very well, then," she said cruelly, "go!" It seemed as if he hadn't heard her, for he leaned forward, his head in his hands, and went on in a voice without expression.

"I've felt for some time that I've been doing you a wrong. People are talking about us — coupling your name with mine — unpleasantly. Heaven knows what lies they're telling. Of course you don't hear — and I don't — but I know they're talking."

"How do you know?"

"My father —— "

"Oh!"

"We quarreled — but the poison left its sting."

Camilla laughed nervously, the laughter of a woman of the world. It grated on him strangely.

"Don't you suppose *I* know?" she said. "I'm not a baby. And now that you've ruined my reputation you're going to leave me. That's unkind of you. Oh, don't worry," she laughed again. "I'll get along. There are others, I suppose."

He straightened and turned toward her sternly.

"You mustn't talk like that," he said. "You're lying. I know your heart. It's clean as snow."

"Because *you* haven't soiled it?" She clasped

her hands over her knees and leaned toward him with wicked coquetry. "Really, Cort, you're a sweet boy — but you lack imagination. You know you're not the only man in the world. A woman in my position has much to gain — little to lose. I'm a derelict, a ship without a captain —— "

He interrupted her by taking her in his arms and putting his fingers over her lips. "Stop!" he whispered, "I'll not listen to you."

"I mean it. I've learned something in your world. I thought life was a sacrament. I find it's only a game." She struggled away from him and went to the fireplace, but he rose and stood beside her.

"You're lying, Camilla," he repeated, "lying to me. Oh, I know — I've been a fool — a vicious — a selfish fool. I've let them talk because I couldn't bear to be without you — because I thought that some day you'd learn what a love like mine meant. And I wanted you — wanted you —— "

"Don't you want me still, Cort?" she asked archly.

He put his elbows on the mantel and gazed into the flames, but would not reply, and the smile faded from her lips before the dignity of his silence.

"I've thought it all out, Camilla. I'm going away on business for my father, and I don't expect to come back. I thought I could go without seeing you again — just send you a note to say good-by. It was easier for me that way. I thought I had won out until I saw you to-day — but now it's harder than ever."

He looked up as he thought she might misconstrue his meaning. "Oh, I'm not afraid to leave on your account. Our set may make you a little careless, a little cynical, but you've got too much pride to lose your grip — and you'll never be anything else but what you are." He gazed into the fire again and went on in the same impersonal tone as if he had forgotten her existence. "I'll always love you, Camilla. . . . I love you more now than I ever did — only it's different somehow. . . . It used to be a madness — an obsession. . . . Your lips, your eyes, your soft fingers, the warm elusive tints of your skin — the petals of the bud — I would have taken them because of their beauty, crushed out, if I could, the soul that lived inside, as one crushes a shrub to make its sweetness sweeter." He sighed deeply and went on: "I told you I loved you then — back there in Mesa City — but I lied to you, Camilla. It wasn't love. Love is calmer, deeper, almost judicial, more mental than physical even. . . . I'm going away from you because I love you more than I love myself."

"Oh! you never loved me," she stammered. "You couldn't speak coldly like this if you did."

He raised his eyes calmly, but made no reply.

"Love — judicial!" she went on scornfully. "What do you know of love? Love is a storm in the heart; a battle — a torrent — it has no mind for anything but itself. Love is ruthless — self-seeking ——"

"You make it hard for me," he said with an effort at calmness.

"You know I — I need you — and yet you'd leave me at a word."

"I'm going — because it's best to go," he said hoarsely.

"You're going because you don't care what happens to me."

He flashed around, unable to endure more, and caught her in his arms. "Do I look like a man who doesn't care? Do I?" he whispered. "If you only hadn't said that — if you only hadn't said that —— "

Now that she had won she was ready to end the battle, and drew timidly away. But with Cort the battle had just begun. And though she struggled to prevent it, he kissed her as he had never done before. Her resistance and the lips she denied him, the suppleness of her strong young body, the perfume of her hair brought back the spell of midsummer madness which had first enchained him.

"You've got to listen to me now, Camilla. I don't care what happens to my promises — to you — or to any one else. I'm mad with love for you. I'll take the soul of you. It was mine by every right before it was his. I'll go away from here — but you'll go with me — somewhere, where we can start again —— "

In that brief moment in his arms there came a startling revelation to Camilla. Cort's touch — his kisses — transformed him into a man she did not know.

"Oh, Cort! Let me go!" she whispered.

"Away from all this where the idle prattle of the world won't matter," he went on wildly. "You have no right to stay on here, using the money he sends you — my money — money he stole from me. He has thrown you over, dropped you like a faded leaf. You're clinging to a rotten tree, Camilla. He'll fall. He's going to fall soon. You'll be buried with him — and nothing between you and death but his neglect and brutality."

In his arms Camilla was sobbing hysterically. The excitement with which she had fed her heart for the last few months had suddenly stretched her nerves to too great a tension. She had been mad — cruel to tantalize him — and she had not realized what her intolerance meant for them both until it was too late.

He misunderstood the meaning of those tears and petted her as if she had been a child.

"Don't, Camilla — there's nothing to fear. I'll be so tender to you — so kind that you'll wonder you could ever have thought of being happy before. Look up at me, dear. Kiss me. You never have, Camilla. Kiss me and tell me you'll go with me — anywhere."

But as he tried to lift her head she put up her hands and with an effort repulsed — broke away from — him and fell on the couch in a passion of tears. She had not meant this — not this. It wasn't in her to love any one.

In the process of mental readjustment following her husband's desertion of her she had learned to

think of Cort in a different way. It seemed as though the tragedy of her married life had dwarfed every other relation, minimized every emotion that remained to her. Cortland Bent was the lesser shadow within the greater shadow, a dimmer figure blurred in the bulk, a part of the tragedy, but not the tragedy itself. For a time he had seemed to understand, and of late had played the part of guide, philosopher, and friend, if not ungrudgingly, at least patiently, without those boyish outbursts of petulance and temper in which he had been so difficult to manage. She cared for him deeply, and lately he had been so considerate and so gentle that she had almost been ready to believe that the kind of devotion he gave her was the only thing in life worth while. He had learned to pass over the many opportunities she offered him to take advantage of her isolation, and she was thankful that at last their relation had found a happy path of communion free from danger or misunderstanding. While other people amused and distracted her, Cort had been her real refuge, his devotion the rock to which she tied. But this! She realized that what had gone before was only the calm before the storm — and she had brought it all on herself!

He watched her anxiously, waiting for the storm to pass, and at last came near and put his arms around her again.

"No — not that!" she said brokenly. "It wasn't that I wanted, Cort. You don't understand. I

needed you — but not that way." He straightened slowly as her meaning came to him.

"You were only — fooling — only playing with me? I might have known —— "

"No, I wasn't playing with you. I — couldn't bear to lose you — but," she stammered resolutely, "now — I *must* —— You've got to go. I don't know what has happened to me — I haven't any heart — I think — no heart — or soul —— "

He had turned away from her, his gaze on the dying log.

"Why couldn't you have let me go — without this?" he groaned. "It would have been easier for both of us."

She sat up slowly, still struggling to suppress the nervous paroxysms which shook her shoulders.

"Forgive me, Cort. You — you'll get along best without me. I've only brought you suffering. I'm a bird of ill-omen — which turns on the hand that feeds it. I was — was thinking only of myself. I wish I could make you happy — you deserve it, Cort. But I can't," she finished miserably, "I can't."

He did not move. It almost seemed as though he had not heard her. His voice came to her at last as though from a distance.

"I know," he groaned. "God help you, you love *him.*" She started up as though in dismay, and then, leaning forward, buried her face in her hands in silent acquiescence. When she looked up a moment later he was gone.

CHAPTER XVII

OLD ROSE LEAVES

CAMILLA wrote nothing to Jeff about her illness. It was nothing very serious, the doctor said — only a fashionable case of nerves. The type was common, the medicine rest and quiet. He commended his own sanitarium, where he could assure her luxury and the very best society, but Camilla refused. She wanted to be alone, and so she denied herself to callers, canceled all her engagements, and took the rest cure in her own way. She slept late in the mornings, took her medicine conscientiously, put herself on a diet, and in the afternoon, with her maid only for company, took long motor rides in the country to out-of-the-way places on roads where she would not be likely to meet her acquaintances.

She knew what it was that she needed. It wasn't the strychnia tonic the doctor had prescribed, or even the rest cure. The more she was alone, the more time she had to think. It was in moments like the present, in the morning hours in her own rooms, that she felt that she could not forget. There was no longer the hum of well-bred voices about her, no music, the glamor of lowered lights, or the odor of embowered roses to distract her mind

or soothe her senses. In the morning hours Jeff was present with her in the flesh. Everything about her reminded her of him; the desk at which he had worked, with its pigeon-holes full of papers in the reckless disorder which was characteristic of him; the corncob pipe which he had refused to discard; the Durham tobacco in its cotton bag beside a government report on mining; the specimens of ore from the "Lone Tree," which he had always used as paper weights; the brass bowl into which he had knocked his ashes; and the photograph, in its jeweled frame, of herself in sombrero and kerchief, taken at Myers's Photograph Gallery in Mesa City at the time when she had taught school, before Jeff's dreams had come true.

She took the picture up and examined it closely. It was the picture of a girl sitting on a table, a lariat in one hand and a quirt in the other, and the background presented Mesa City's idea of an Italian villa, with fluted columns, backed by some palms and a vista of lake. How well she remembered that gray painted screen and the ornate wicker chair and table which were its inevitable accompaniment. They had served as a background for Pete Mulrennan in a Prince Albert coat, when he was elected mayor; for Jack Williams, the foreman of the "Lazy L" ranch, and his bride from Kinney; for Mrs. Brennan in her new black silk dress; for the Harbison twins and their cherubic mother. She put the photograph down, and her head sank forward on her arms in mute rebellion. In her sleep

she had murmured Cort's name, and Jeff had heard her. But she knew that in itself this was not enough to have caused the breach. What else had he heard? Jeff had tired of her — that was all — had tired of being married to a graven image, to a mere semblance of the woman he had thought she was. She could not blame him for that. It was his right to be tired of her if he chose.

It was the sudden revelation of the actual state of her mind with regard to Cortland which had given her the first suggestion of her true bearings — that and the careless chatter of the people of their set in which Mrs. Cheyne was leading. Cortland had guessed the truth which she had been so resolutely hiding from herself. She loved Jeff — had always loved him — and would until the end of time. Like the chemist who for months has been seeking the solution of a problem, she had found the acid which had magically liberated the desired element; the acid was Jealousy, and, after all dangerous vapors had passed, Love remained in the retort, elemental and undefiled. The simplicity of the revelation was as beautiful as it was mystifying. Had she by some fortuitous accident succeeded in transmuting some baser metal into gold, she could not have been more bewildered. Of course, Jeff could not know. To him she was still the Graven Image, the pretty Idol, the symbol of what might have been. How could he guess that his Idol had been made flesh and blood — that now she waited for him, no longer a symbol of lost

illusions, but just a woman — his wife. She raised her head at last, sighed deeply, and put the photograph in the drawer of the desk. As she did so, the end of a small battered tin box protruded. She remembered it at once — for in it Jeff had always kept the letters and papers which referred to his birth and babyhood. She had looked them over before with Jeff, but it was almost with a feeling of timidity at an intrusion that she took the box out and opened it now. The papers were ragged, soiled, and stained with dampness and age, and the torn edges had been joined with strips of court-plaster. There were two small portraits taken by a photographer in Denver. Camilla took the photographs in her fingers and looked at them with a new interest. One of the pictures was of a young woman of about Camilla's age, in a black beaded Jersey waist and a full overskirt. Her front hair was done in what was known as a "bang," and the coils were twisted high on top of her head. But even these disfigurements — according to the lights of a later generation — could not diminish the attractiveness of her personality. There was no denying the beauty of the face, the wistful eyes, the straight, rather short nose, the sensitive lips, and the deeply indented, well-made chin — none of the features in the least like Jeff's except the last, which, though narrower than his, had the same firm lines at the angle of the jaw. It was not a weak face, nor a strong one, for whatever it gained at brows and chin it lost at the eyes and mouth.

But Jeff's resemblance to his father was remarkable. Except for the old-fashioned collar and "string" tie, the queerly cut coat, and something in the brushing of the hair, the figure in the other photograph was that of her husband in the life. She had discovered this when she and Jeff had looked into the tin box just after they were married, and had commented on it, but Jeff had said nothing in reply. He had only looked at the picture steadily for a moment, then rather abruptly taken it from her and put it away. From this Camilla knew that the thoughts of his mother were the only ones which Jeff had cared to select from the book of memory and tradition. Of his father he had never spoken, nor would speak. He would not even read again these letters which his mother had kept, wept over, and handed down to her son that the record of a man's ignominy might be kept intact for the generations to follow her.

It was, therefore, with a sense of awe, of intrusion upon the mystery of a sister's tragedy, that Camilla opened the letters again and read them. There were eight of them in all, under dates from May until October, 1875, all with the same superscription "Ned." As she read, Camilla remembered the whole sad story, and, with the face of the woman before her, was able to supply almost word for word the tender, passionate, bitter, forgiving letters which must have come between. She had pleaded with him in May to return to her, but in June, from New York, he had written her that he could not tell when he would

go West again. In July he was sure he would not go West until the following year, if then. In August he sent her money — which she must have returned —for the next letter referred to it. In September his manner was indifferent — in October it was heartless. It had taken only six months for this man madly to love and then as madly to forget.

Camilla remembered the rest of the story as Jeff had told it to her, haltingly, shamedly, one night at Mrs. Brennan's, as it had been told to him when he was a boy by one of the nurses who had taken him away from the hospital where his mother had died — of her persistent refusal to speak of Jeff's father or to reveal his identity, of Jeff's birth without a name, and of his mother's death a few weeks later, unrepentant and unforgiving. With her last words she had blessed the child and prayed that they would not name it after her. At first he had been playfully called "Thomas Jefferson," and so Thomas Jefferson he remained until later another of his guardians had added the "Wray" after a character in a book she was reading and "because it sounded pretty." That was Jeff's christening.

Camilla put the letters aside with the faded blue ribbon which had always accompanied them and gazed at the photograph of Jeff's father. Yes, it was a cruel face — a handsome, cruel face — and it looked like Jeff. She had never thought of Jeff as being cruel. Did she really know her husband, after all? Until they had come to New York Jeff had always been forbearing, kindly, and tender.

Before their marriage he had sometimes been impatient with her — but since that time, often when he had every right to be angry, he had contented himself with a baby-like stare and had then turned away and left her. Flashes of cruelty sometimes had shown in his treatment of the Mexicans on the railroad or at the mines, but it was not the kind of cruelty this man in the photograph had shown — not the enduring cruelty of heartlessness which would let a woman die for the love of him. The night Jeff had left her the worst in him was dominant, and yet she had not thought of him as cruel. It was to the future alone which she must look for an answer to the troubled question that rose in her mind.

At this moment her maid entered — a welcome interruption.

"Will you see Mrs. Rumsen, Madame?"

"Oh, yes, Celeste. Ask her if she won't come in here."

Of all the friendships she had made in New York, that of Mrs. Rumsen was the one Camilla most deeply prized. There was a tincture of old-world simplicity in her grandeur. Only those persons were snobbish, Mrs. Rumsen always averred, whose social position was insecure. It was she who had helped Camilla to see society as it really was, laid bare to her its shams, its inconsistencies, and its follies; who had shown her the true society of old New York; taken her to unfamiliar heights among the "cliff-dwellers" of the old régime who lived in the quiet elegance of social security with and for their

friends, unmoved by the glitter of modern gewgaws, who resisted innovations and fought hard for old traditions which the newer generation was seeking to destroy, a mild-eyed, incurious race of people who were sure that what they had and were was good, and viewed the social extravagances as the inhabitants of another planet might do, from afar, who went into the world when they chose, and returned to their "cliffs" when they chose, sure of their welcome at either place. They were the people Rita Cheyne called "frumps," and Cortland Bent, "bores," but to Camilla, who had often found herself wondering what was the end and aim of all things, they were a symbol of completion.

Mrs. Rumsen laid aside her wraps with the deliberation of a person who is sure of her welcome.

"You'll forgive my appearance?" asked Camilla. "I didn't think you'd mind."

"I'm flattered, child. It has taken longer than I supposed it would to teach you not to be punctilious with me. Well, you're better, of course. This long rest has done wonders for you."

"Oh, yes. But I'm afraid I wouldn't last long here. I'm used to air and sunshine and bed at ten o'clock at night." She paused a moment. "I've been thinking of going West for a while."

"Really? When?"

"I — I haven't decided. I thought that Jeff would have returned by this time, but his business still keeps him."

"And you miss him? That's very improper. I'm

afraid I haven't schooled you carefully enough." She smiled and sighed. "That is a vulgar weakness your woman of society must never confess to. We may love our husbands as much as we like, but we mustn't let people know it. It offends their conceit and reminds them unpleasantly of their own deficiencies."

"People aren't really as bad as you're trying to paint then," laughed Camilla. "Even you, Mrs. Rumsen! Why, I thought the habit of cynicism was only for the very young and inexperienced."

"Thanks, child. Perhaps it's my second childhood. I don't want to be cynical — but I must. One reason I came to you is because I want you to refresh my point of view. I wonder what air and sunshine and bed at ten o'clock would do for me. Would you like to prescribe it for me? I wonder if you wouldn't take me West with you."

Camilla laughed again.

"Are you really in earnest? Of course I'd be delighted — but I'm afraid you wouldn't be. The accommodations are abominable except, of course, in Denver, and you wouldn't want to stay there. You know our — our house isn't finished yet. It would be fine if we could camp — but that isn't very comfortable. I love it. But you know there are no porcelain tubs —— "

"Oh, I know. I've camped in the West, dear, a good many years ago — before you were born. I wonder how I should like it now —— "

She paused, her wandering gaze resting on the desk, which Camilla had left in disorder, the letters scattered, the photographs at which she had been looking propped upright against the tin document-box. It was on the photographs that Mrs. Rumsen's gaze had stopped. Slowly she rose from her chair, with an air of arrested attention, adjusted her lorgnon, and examined it at close range.

"I thought I might have been mistaken at first," she said quickly. "I see I'm not. Camilla, dear, where on earth did you get that photograph of the General?"

Camilla had risen. "The General?" she faltered. "I don't understand."

"Of my brother — Cornelius Bent — that is his photograph. I have one like it in the family album at home."

"That can't be."

"I was looking over them only the other day — why do you look so strangely?"

"Are you sure? You *can't* be sure —— "

"I am. I remember the queer cravat and the pose of the hands on the chair. I remember him, too — perfectly. Do you think I wouldn't know my own brother?"

"Oh, there must be some mistake — it is dreadful. I can't —— "

"What is dreadful, child? What do you mean?" She laid a hand on Camilla's arm, and Camilla caught at it, her nerves quivering.

"The photograph is —— "

"Where did you get it? It isn't mine, is it? or Cortland's?"

"No, no. It has been in that tin box for more than thirty years. It isn't yours. It's Jeff's — my husband's — do you understand? It's his — oh, I can't tell you. It's too horrible. I can't believe it myself. I don't want to believe it."

She sank into the chair at the desk, trembling violently. Mrs. Rumsen, somewhat surprised and aware of the imminence of a revelation the nature of which she could not even faintly surmise, bent over Camilla kindly and touched her gently on the shoulder.

"Compose yourself, Camilla, and if you think I ought to know, tell me. What had my brother to do with you or yours? How did his picture come here?"

Camilla replied with difficulty.

"That picture has been in Jeff's possession since he was a baby. It was the only heritage his mother left him, the photograph and these letters. I have just been reading them. They were written to *her*. *He* had deserted her — before Jeff was born —— "

Mrs. Rumsen's hand had dropped from Camilla's shoulder, and she turned quickly away — with a sharp catch in her breath. When she spoke, her voice, like Camilla's, was suppressed and controlled with difficulty.

"Then my brother was — your husband's —— "

"Oh, I don't know," Camilla broke in quickly. "It is all so dreadful. There may be some mistake.

Jeff will never speak of it. He has tried all these years to forget. I don't know why I took these letters out to read. Perhaps it would be better if you hadn't known —— "

"No, no. I think I ought to know. Perhaps in justice to my brother —— "

"There can be no justice for Jeff's father, Mrs. Rumsen. I have read his letters to her — to Jeff's mother. Before you came in I was trying to think of a punishment horrible enough for the kind of men who deceive women as he did, and then leave them to face the world alone."

"But perhaps there was something you don't know —— " she groped vainly.

"Every question you would ask, every excuse that he could offer, is answered in these letters. Now that you know Jeff's story perhaps you had better read them."

With trembling hands she gathered the letters and gave them to her visitor, who now sat in the big armchair near the window, her straight figure almost judicial in its severity. She glanced at the handwriting and at the signature, and then let the papers fall into her lap.

"Yes, they are my brother's," she said slowly. "It is his handwriting — and the name — the General's name is Cornelius Edward — 'Ned' was his name at college — he never used his first name until later in life. I — I suppose there's no doubt about it."

She sat with one hand to her brow as though

trying to reconcile two parts of an astounding narrative. Camilla's revelation did not seem in the least like reality. Cornelius Bent's part in it was so at variance with his character as she had known it. There had never been time for love or for play. When he had given up his profession of engineering and plunged into business downtown his youth was ended. She recalled that this must have been about the time he returned from the Western trip — the year before he was married. The making of money had been the only thing in life her brother had ever cared about. He had loved his wife in his peculiar way until she died, and he had been grateful for his children. His membership in the —— Regiment, years ago, had been a business move, and the service, though distinguished, had made him many valuable business connections, but all of Cornelius Bent's family knew that his heart and his soul were downtown, day and night, night and day.

And yet there seemed no chance that Camilla could be mistaken. The marks of handling, the stains of Time — perhaps of tears — the pin-hole at the top, these were the only differences between the photograph in her album at home and the one she now held in her fingers.

Camilla waited for her to speak again. Her own heart was too full of Jeff and of what this discovery might mean to him to be willing to trust herself to further speech until she was sure that her visitor understood the full meaning of the situation. There

was a sudden appreciation of the delicacy of her own position and of the danger to which her friendship with Mrs. Rumsen was being subjected — and, highly as she had prized it, Camilla knew that if her visitor could not take her own point of view with regard to Jeff's father and with regard to Jeff himself she must herself bring that friendship to an end. In some anxiety she waited and watched Mrs. Rumsen while she read. The proud head was bent, the brows and chin had set in austere lines, and Camilla, not knowing what to expect, sat silently and waited.

"It is true, of course," said her visitor, softly. "There can't be the slightest doubt of it now. There are some allusions here which identify these letters completely. I don't know just what to say to you, child. From the first time I saw your husband he attracted me curiously — reflected a memory — you remember my speaking of it? It all seems so clear to me now that the wonder is I didn't think of it myself. The resemblance between the two men is striking even now."

"Yes — yes — I hadn't thought of that."

There was another silence, during which Mrs. Rumsen seemed to realize what was passing in Camilla's mind — her sudden reticence and the meaning of it, for she straightened in her chair and extended both hands warmly.

"It is all true. But my brother's faults shall make no difference in my feeling for his children. If anything I should and will love them the more. Come

and kiss me, Camilla, dear," she said with gentle simplicity.

And Camilla, her heart full of her kindness, fell on her knees at Mrs. Rumsen's feet.

"You are so good — so kind," she sobbed happily.

"Not at all," said Mrs. Rumsen with a return of her old "grenadier" manner, at the same time touching her handkerchief to her eyes. "To whom should I not be good unless to my own. If my brother disowns your husband, there's room enough in my own empty heart for you both —— "

Camilla started back frightened, her eyes shining through her tears.

"You must not speak of this to *him* — to General Bent — not yet. I must think what it is best for us to do."

"No, dear. I'll not speak of it. I'll never speak of it unless you allow me to. It is your husband's affair. He shall do what he thinks best. As for Cornelius — it is a matter for my brother — and his God —— "

"He has forgotten. Perhaps it would be better if he never knew."

"Something tells me that he will learn the truth. It was written years ago. It will not come through me — because it is not my secret to tell. One thing only is certain in my mind, and that is that your husband, Jeff, must be told. It is his right."

"Yes, I know. I must go to him. It will be terrible news for him."

"Terrible?"

"I fear so. I remember his once saying that if he ever found his father he'd shoot him as he would a dog."

As Mrs. Rumsen drew back in alarm, she added quickly, "Oh, no, of course he didn't mean that. That was just Jeff's way of expressing himself."

As Camilla rose, Mrs. Rumsen sighed deeply.

"I don't suppose I have any right to plead for my brother — but you and Jeff must do him justice, too. All this happened a long while ago. Between that time and this lie thirty years of good citizenship and honorable manhood. Cornelius has been no despoiler of women." She picked up the papers again. "The curious thing about it, Camilla, is that nowhere in these letters is there any mention of a child. I can't understand that. Have you thought — that perhaps he did not know? It's very strange, mystifying. I have never known the real heart of my brother, but he could hardly have been capable of *that*. He was never given at any time to show his feelings — even to his wife or his family. Have you thought — that perhaps he loved — Jeff's mother?"

"I hope — I pray that he did. Perhaps if Jeff could believe that — but the letters — no, Mrs. Rumsen — no man who had ever loved could have written that last letter."

"But you must do what you can to make your husband see the best of it, Camilla. That is your duty, child — don't you see it that way?"

Camilla was kneeling on a chair, her elbows on its back, her fingers wreathing her brows.

"Yes, I suppose so," she sighed. "But I'm afraid in this matter Jeff will not ask my opinions — he must choose for himself. I don't know what he will do or say. You could hardly expect him to show filial devotion. Gladys and Cortland" — she rose in a new dismay and walked to the window — "I had not thought of them."

Her visitor followed Camilla with questioning eyes. "They must share the burden — it is theirs, too," she put in after a moment.

"It is very hard for me to know what to do. It is harder now than it would have been before this fight of the Amalgamated for the smelter. They are enemies — don't you suppose I hear the talk about it? General Bent has sworn to ruin Jeff — to put him out of business; and Jeff will fight until he drops. Father against son — oh, Mrs. Rumsen, what can be done?" She took the photograph and letters from the lap of her visitor and stood before the mantel. "If I burned them —— "

"No, no," Mrs. Rumsen had risen quickly and seized Camilla by the arm. "You mustn't do that."

"It would save so much pain —— "

"No one saved *her* pain. You have no right. Who are you to play the part of Providence to two human souls? This drama was arranged years before you were born. It's none of your affair. Fate has simply used you — used *us* — as humble instruments in working out its plans."

Camilla shook her head. "It can do Jeff no good. It will do Gladys and Cortland harm. Jeff has forgotten the past. It has done him no harm — except that he has no name. He has won his way without a name — even this will not give him one. Jeff's poor incubus will be a grim reality — tangible flesh — to be despised."

Mrs. Rumsen looked long into the fire. "I can't believe it," she said slowly. "My brother and I are not on the best of terms — we have never been intimate, because we could not understand each other. But he is not the kind of man any one despises. People downtown say he has no soul. If he hasn't, then this news can be no blow to him. If he has —— "

She paused. And then, instead of going on, took Camilla by the hand.

"Camilla," she said gently, "we must think long over this — but not now. It must be slept on. Get dressed while I read these letters, and we'll take a spin into the country. Perhaps by to-morrow we'll be able to see things more clearly."

CHAPTER XVIII

COMBAT

IT HAD been a time of terrific struggles. For four months Wray's enemies had used every device that ingenuity could devise to harass him in the building of his new road, the Saguache Short Line; had attacked the legality of every move in the courts; hampered and delayed, when they could, the movement of his material; bribed his engineers and employés; offered his Mexicans double wages elsewhere; found an imaginary flaw in his title to the Hermosa Estate which for a time prevented the shipment of ties until Larry came on and cleared the matter up. Finally they caused a strike at the Pueblo Steel Works, where his rails were made, so that before the completion of the contract the works were shut down. Tooth and nail Jeff fought them at every point, and Pete Mulrennan's judge at Kinney, whose election had taken place before the other crowd had made definite plans, had been an important asset in the fight for supremacy.

The other crowd had appealed from his decisions, of course, but the law so far had been on Wray's side, and there was little chance that the decisions would be overruled in the higher court. But as

Jeff well knew, the Amalgamated crowd had no intention of standing on ceremony, and what they couldn't do in one way they attempted to accomplish in another. Five carloads of ties on the Denver and Saguache railroad were ditched in an arroyo between Mesa City and Saguache. Wray's engineers reported that the trestles had been tampered with. Jeff satisfied himself that this was true, then doubled his train crews, supplied the men with Winchesters and revolvers, and put a deputy sheriff in the cab of each locomotive. After that an explosion of dynamite destroyed a number of his flat cars, and a fire in the shops was narrowly averted. A man caught at the switches had been shot and was now in the hospital at Kinney with the prospect of a jail sentence before him. Judge Weigel was a big gun in Kinney, and he liked to make a big noise. He would keep the law in Saguache County, he said, if he had to call on the Governor to help him.

More difficult to combat were the dissensions Jeff found among his own employés. The German engineers, like other men, were fallible, and left him when the road was half done because they were offered higher salaries elsewhere. His under-engineers, his contractors, his foremen were all subject to the same influences, but he managed somehow to keep the work moving. New men, some of them just out of college, were imported from the East and Middle West, and the Development Company was turned into an employment agency to keep

the ranks of workmen filled. Mexicans went and Mexicans came, but the building of the road went steadily on. There were no important engineering problems to solve, since the greater part of the line passed over the plains, where the fills and cuts were small and the grading inexpensive. Seven months had passed since ground had been broken and the road, in spite of obstacles, had been nearly carried to completion.

Already Wray had had a taste of isolation. For two months there had been but one passenger train a day between Kinney and Saguache. To all intents and purposes Kinney was now the Western terminus of the road, and Saguache was beginning to feel the pinch of the grindstones. Notwithstanding the findings of the Railroad Commission, Judge Weigel's decision, and Jeff's representations through his own friends at Washington, the Denver and Western refused to put on more trains. Saguache, they contended, was not the real terminus of the road; that the line had been extended from Kinney some years before to tap a coal field which had not proved successful; that Saguache was not a growing community, and that the old stage line still in operation between the two towns would be adequate for every purpose. These were lies of course, vicious lies, for every one knew that since the development of the Mesa City properties Saguache had trebled in size, and that the freight business alone in ten years would have provided for the entire bonded indebtedness of the road.

What might happen in time Jeff did not know or care. It was a matter which must be fought out at length and might take years to settle. The Chicago and Utah Railroad Company for the present had command of the situation. To handle the business Jeff had put on a dozen four-mule teams between Kinney and Saguache, which carried his freight and necessary supplies along the old trail over the Boca Pass, which was shorter by ten miles than the railroad, a heart-breaking haul and a dangerous one to man and beast. But it was the only thing left for him to do.

Realizing the futility of any efforts at coërcion, Jeff had relinquished the losing battle and had put his heart and soul into the building of the Saguache Short Line. He knew every stick and stone of it and rode along the line from camp to camp, lending some of his own enthusiasm to the foremen of the gangs, pitting one crowd against the other in friendly rivalry for substantial bonuses. At last the connecting links were forged and only a matter of twenty miles of track remained to be laid — when the Pueblo Steel Works shut down. This was a severe blow — one on which Jeff had not counted. The penalties for non-delivery to which the steel company were liable were heavy, but Jeff did not want the penalties. Compared with his own magnificent financial prospects, the penalties were only a drop in the bucket. He wanted his road. His entire future depended upon its completion — the smelter, the Develop-

ment Company, and all his chain of mining, coal, and lumber properties. Without that road he was now at the mercy of his enemies.

Twenty miles of rails! They seemed very little in the face of what he had already accomplished. He had not counted on this, and had laid no alternative plans. The Denver and California people were powerless to help him. A subtle influence was at work among the steel companies, and, so far as Jeff could see, it would take him from three to five months to get his rails from the West or East. In the meanwhile what might his enemies not accomplish in bringing about his downfall. What would become of his pledges to the settlers on the Hermosa Estate — and the lot-holders of Saguache, many of whose houses were only half built while they waited for the material to complete them? These people were already impatient, and in a short while, unless something could be done to open connections, the storm must break.

Some days before, by request, Jeff had met Cortland Bent in Denver. He was glad to learn that at last the Amalgamated had decided to come out into the open and kept the appointment, wondering why the General had chosen Cortland as his emissary. He had entered the offices of the Chicago and Utah with his usual air of self-confidence, frankly curious as to what part Cort could be expected to play in such a big game. It did not take him long to learn. They had not been talking more than a few moments before Jeff discovered

that General Bent had made no mistake. The bored, abstracted air of the gilded youth, the mannerisms which Jeff had been accustomed to associate with Cortland Bent, were for some reason lacking. In the short time since they had last met a change of some sort had come over his old acquaintance. He conveyed an impression of spareness and maturity, as though in a night he had melted off all superfluities of flesh and spirit. His eyes now seemed to be more deeply set, their gaze, formerly rather deliberate, now penetrating, almost to a degree of shrewdness. He was no longer the boy who had been a failure. He was now the man who had tasted the bitterness of success.

"I thought we might make one more effort for peace, Wray. That's why I'm here. I'm fully informed as to the affairs of the Amalgamated Reduction Company and as to my father's previous conversations with you. I'm authorized to talk over your interests in the Valley. We thought before carrying out all our plans you might like to have a chance to reconsider."

"That's pretty clever of you, Bent. I'm ready to talk business — any time. Fire away!"

"I will. By this time you have probably formed some sort of an idea of the kind of a proposition you're up against. I'm not making any pretence of friendship when I warn you that you're going to lose out in the end. My instructions are to ask you to come in with us now. Later perhaps you couldn't do it so advantageously."

"H — m! I'm figuring my chances are getting better every minute, Bent." He paused and then added, smiling, "How would your crowd like to come in with me? I've got a good thing — a very good thing. And I wouldn't mind selling a small block at a good figure. It seems a pity to cut each other's throats, don't it? They'll be building houses of gold-bricks out here next year, and you and I will pay the bill — while we might be putting a snug profit into our pockets."

Bent remembered another bluff of Wray's which had been expensive, so he only laughed.

"You once froze me out with a pair of deuces, Wray, but I'm holding cards this hand," he finished quietly.

"I haven't such a bad hand, Bent," drawled Jeff, shaking some Durham into a paper. "Even 'fours' wouldn't scare me." He put the drawing string of his tobacco-bag in his teeth and closed the bag viciously. "See here — we're wasting time. What are your offers? If they're not better than your father's were, it's not worth while talking."

"Better than my father's?" Cortland couldn't restrain a gasp of admiration. "Why, Wray, your property isn't worth what it was."

"Why not?" savagely.

"Well, for one thing," said Cortland coolly, "your railroad connections are not what they might be. I might add to that, there's no assurance they're going to be improved."

"Not unless I give it to you. Trains are sched-

uled to run on the Saguache Short Line on the twenty-fifth of May."

"They're not going to run, Wray." Jeff turned on him quickly, but Cortland's eyes met his eagerly. "That's true," he added. "Believe it or not, as you choose."

Jeff's sharp glance blurred quickly. Then he smiled and looked out of the window with his childish stare.

"Oh, well," he said quietly, "we'll do the best we can."

"You'd better take my advice and come in with us now. We'll meet you in a fair spirit ——"

"Why?" asked Jeff suddenly. "Why should you meet me in any kind of spirit. You've got things all your own way — at the upper end of the Valley — now you say you've coppered my outlet at Pueblo."

"Yes, that's true. But there are other reasons why we prefer to go no farther without an effort to come to terms. We're frank in admitting that when we can accomplish anything by compromise we prefer to do it. This fight has been expensive. It promises to be more expensive. But, no matter what your reasons, ours are greater, and no matter what move you make, the Amalgamated can check you. The Amalgamated will win in the end. It always has. It always will. You've only to look at its history ——"

"Oh, I know its history," said Wray. "It's a history of organized crime in three states. You've

had a succession of easy marks — of sure things. I'm another one. You've got a sure thing. Why don't you go ahead and play it. Why do you want to talk about it? I wouldn't in your place. I'd clean you out and hang your bones up the way you did Conrad Seemuller's, for the crows to roost on." Wray leaned forward and brought his fist down on the table. "I know what your 'fair spirit' means, Cort Bent. It means that your 'sure thing' is a 'selling plater'; that you've played your best cards and the tricks are still in my hand."

Cortland Bent's shoulders moved almost imperceptibly.

"You're mistaken," he said shortly.

"Well, you'll have to prove it. I lived for some years in Missouri."

"Then you won't consider any basis for settlement?"

"There's nothing to settle. You started this fight. Now finish it. Either your father wins — or I do. He wouldn't consider my figures in New York. He'd be less likely to consider them now. They've gone up since then."

Cortland rose and walked to the window.

"I warn you that you're making a mistake. This is neither a bluff nor a threat. I mean what I say. You're going to lose. You've been hampered by lack of railroad facilities. How do you like it? Your own mines have kept your plant busy, but you can't buy any ore and you can't compete with us. You'll never be able to."

"I'll take my chances."

"Then this is final?"

"Yes." And, as Cortland Bent rose and took up his hat, "You go back to those that sent you here and say that on the twenty-fifth of May the Saguache Smelting Company will be in the market for ore. I've never competed with your company. I've always been content to take my profit at the current prices. But if it's necessary to be a hog to remain in this business, I'll be the biggest hog now or get out of it. You tell your people that in future I'll regulate my schedule to theirs, and whatever the prices of the Amalagmated are, my prices will be better. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly. I'm much obliged. Good morning."

The interview had terminated rather suddenly — almost too suddenly to be entirely satisfactory to Jeff, who had at first seen in a talk with Cortland Bent an opportunity to learn by inductive methods something of the future plans of his enemies. He realized, as he watched Bent's squared shoulders disappear through the door of an inner office, that in this respect he had been entirely unsuccessful. Bent had revealed nothing that Jeff did not know before. Jeff had a feeling, too, that Bent had retired with a slight advantage, even though it had been moral rather than tactical. Throughout the interview Bent had preserved the same demeanor of quiet confidence, of repression and solidity, which, in spite of his advances, had more than offset Jeff's violence and distemper. What

had come over the man? Had he found himself at last?

In his heart Jeff had always had a feeling of good-humored contempt for the men of Cortland Bent's class, and the fact that Camilla preferred this one to him had made him less tolerant of them even than before. He was unwilling to acknowledge to himself the slight sense of shock he had experienced in discovering that Cort Bent was now a foeman worthy of his own metal. Their trails were crossing too often. It wasn't healthy for either of them.

He understood now why it was that Camilla had written him vaguely of an urgent matter about which she could not write, requesting permission to come West at once. He had put it down to the whim of a woman — as he did everything feminine he could not understand. It was all clear to him now. She wanted to be near Cortland Bent and feared to take any definite step which might compromise her in the eyes of her husband. He had had some misgivings about her letters — they had seemed so frank, so womanly and friendly, with a touch of regretful tenderness in them that was unlike anything Jeff could remember when they had been together. But he was glad now that he had refused her. Seeing Bent had brought back into Jeff's mind the whole sad history of their mistaken marriage. There wasn't a day when he didn't miss her, and his business worries were never so thick about him that her image didn't intrude. Frequently he found himself thinking and plan-

ning, as he used to plan, for Camilla; only to remember bitterly in time that the battle he was fighting was only for himself. And now the man she loved had come down to help the legions of autocracy against him. He was glad of that. It would nerve him for the struggle. He could fight better with Cort Bent on the other side.

With an effort he put the thought of Camilla from his mind and went about his other business with a new determination to circumvent his foes. He always fought better when his back was to the wall, and his conversation with Bent had confirmed the necessity of completing the Short Line at any cost.

The drains upon his resources had been enormous. Three million dollars had already been spent, and there was another million still to be provided for. His expenses had been greater because of the unusual impediments thrown in his way. The mine was paying "big," and the railroad and the banks were still backing him, but he knew that there was a limit to the amounts he must expect from these quarters. He had tried to buy rails in the open market and found that his enemies had forestalled him. The mills agreed to take his orders, but during the press of business refused to name a definite date for delivery. General Bent, whose friendship was necessary to the steel interests East and West, had seen to that. But if the Amalgamated thought that the lack of rails was going to stop the construction of the Short Line, they were going to have another guess.

Already an alternative plan had suggested itself to Wray, a desperate, unheard-of plan which he could never have thought of except as a last resort. But the more he thought of it, the more convinced he was that it was the only solution of his problem. He would tear up the rails of the old narrow-gauge which ran from Mesa City up to the old coal field at Trappe. They were light rails, old and rusty from disuse, but they were *rails*, and by the use of more ties and "blue-boards" for the time would serve his purpose. With the sidings and a reserve supply of the D. & S. at Saguache, he managed to figure out enough to finish the Short Line. He knew his engineers wouldn't approve — they couldn't approve, he knew, on any grounds but those of expediency, for such construction was dangerous and would make the accomplishment of any kind of a fast schedule impossible, but they would give him his connection — without which all of his plans must fall to earth. By October, or perhaps by late summer, he would manage to get standard rails somewhere. It would be easier once the road was in operation. He couldn't help smiling when he went into the office of the Denver and California. If this was the last card Bent's crowd could play, it was on the tallies that they were to lose the game.

His plans met with the approval of his friends, and Jeff went back to Mesa City with a lighter heart than when he had left it. A hurried conference with his engineers and directors, which ex-

hausted some of Jeff's strength and most of his patience, and the old road was doomed to destruction. Nor was Jeff satisfied until three dilapidated flat cars loaded with Mexicans and tools were started over the line to the coal fields. Then he turned with a sigh under the "Watch Us Grow" sign and went into his private office, where an accumulation of mining business awaited him.

But his sense of triumph was short-lived. The week had not ended before advices of a disquieting nature reached him from Denver and Pueblo of a considerable activity in the stock of the Denver and California. This information in itself was not surprising, for during the past year the rate-war and the unsettled condition of the country had made the stock of the road particularly vulnerable to manipulation? But back of this movement, Symonds, the General Manager of the road, one of Wray's staunchest supporters, thought he detected powerful influences. Rumors of a more startling character had transpired, signifying the transfer of large blocks of the stock to Eastern investors which seriously threatened the control of those in power. Other men, men of the directorate, Jeff discovered, also showed signs of apprehension. A reorganization of the road might mean anything — to Jeff it meant ruin, if the new stockholders were in any way identified with the Chicago and Utah. Was this Bent's crowd? For the first time Wray really appreciated the lengths to which his enemies were prepared to go to accomplish his downfall.

He knew that they had already spent large sums and had used all their influence in completing their control of the Denver and Western, but a control of the Denver and California! It was simply incredible!

Letters from the banks were still more disquieting. Conditions, they wrote, were so unsatisfactory throughout the West that their boards of directors had thought it advisable to call their loans on the stock of the Denver and Saguache Railroad Company. The uncertainty of the development of the Saguache Company's properties, owing to the imperfection of their railroad connections, made this course necessary until they secured definite and satisfactory assurances as to the completion of the Saguache Short Line and the value of its contracts with the Denver and California Railroad Company. The receipt of these letters in the same mail was a coincidence which showed Jeff that, in spite of all assurances to the contrary, his friends were weakening under fire and that the enemy had invaded his own country. They meant, in short, that unless he could meet the loans at once — eight hundred thousand dollars on stock really worth two millions and a half — those securities would fall into the hands of the Amalgamated people.

Eight hundred thousand dollars! It seemed a prodigious sum of money now. The "Lone Tree" would bring that in the open market — of course, but he and Pete could not sell the "Lone Tree." It was the backbone of his entire financial position! Really alarmed at the sudden disastrous turn the

company's affairs had taken, he called a meeting of Mulrennan, Larry Berkely, Weigel, Willoughby, and other available directors, and then hurried to Denver to see his friends in the D. & C.

Other disappointments awaited him there. Symonds, and Shackelton, the vice-president, advised him for the sake of his head, as well, perhaps, as for their own, to compromise with his enemies if he could. Until more light was shed as to the new ownership of the D. & C. they could make him no further promises of assistance either moral or financial. He argued with them, pleaded with them at least for some pledge on the part of the road with which he could reassure the banks. They were powerless, they said. Their contracts, of course, would be a basis for a suit even under a new management. They could — or would do nothing more.

A suit? Jeff knew what that meant — interminable legal proceedings, while the ties of the Saguache Short Line rotted under the rails, and washouts in the summer tore the roadbed to pieces; it meant the shutting down of his coal mines, the abandonment of his lumber camps, the complete isolation of his mines and smelter, which, if they did business at all, must do it under all kinds of disadvantages.

There was only one thing left to do, and that was to finish the Short Line and put it into operation. Then, perhaps, the courts would uphold him and force the D. & C. to live up to its contracts — no

matter who was in control. But how was he to redeem the eight hundred thousand in stock? He had enough available capital to finish the Short Line, but not enough to redeem the stock, too. He got on the Denver and Western sleeper for Kinney that night, sore in mind and body. He was too tired even to think. Larry and Pete must help him now. Perhaps there was some way. He fell into a troubled sleep, and about his ears Cornelius Bent's railroad mocked at him in noisy triumph.

* * * * *

The arrival of the morning train from Saguache was an event in Mesa City. There were but two trains a day, and it was the morning train which brought the mail and yesterday's newspapers from Denver. For obvious reasons, the passenger traffic was small, and, as almost every member of the Saguache community was personally known to almost every citizen of Mesa City, the greetings as a rule were short and laconic, consisting of a rustic nod or the mere mention of a surname. Most of the travelers were men and descended from the combination baggage-smoker; but this morning Bill Wilkinson, the conductor (and brakeman), a person by nature taciturn, appeared upon the platform of the rear coach bearing a lady's English traveling bag, and winked, actually winked, at Ike Matthews, the station master, who was waiting for his envelope from headquarters. At least eight people saw that wink and fully eighteen the

handbag, and, when a pretty lady in a dove-gray traveling suit appeared in the car doorway to be helped down ceremoniously to the station platform, thirty-six eyes were agog and thirty-six ears were open to learn the meaning of the unusual occurrence; for it was plainly to be seen that the visitor bore every mark of consequence and came from the East — surely from Denver — possibly from Chicago.

They saw her smile her thanks to Wilkinson, but when she looked rather helplessly about her and asked for a "coupé" or "station wagon" a snigger, immediately suppressed, arose from the younger persons in the audience. The firm hand of Ike Matthews now took control of the situation.

"Do you want the hotel, ma'am?" he said.

"Yes, I think so," said the lady. "But first I want to find Mr. Jeff Wray. Can you tell me where I can see him?"

Her eyes searched the cottonwood trees along the creek opposite the station, as though she hoped to find him there, searching in the wrong direction for the town which had been described to her.

"Yes, ma'am, if you'll come with me." Ike took up the bag and led the way around the corner of the building into Main Street, while the engineer and fireman hung out of their cab and with the crowd on the platform followed the slim figure with their eyes until it vanished into the crowd at the post-office.

A clerk in the outer room of the Development Company's office building received the queer pair.

"Mr. Wray is in, ma'am, but he's very busy." He looked at her timidly. "I don't know whether he'll see you or not. Who shall I say?"

The lady handed him a card, and, as he disappeared, she fingered in her pocketbook for change — then, after a glance at the station master, smiled at him instead.

"I'm much obliged to you," she said gratefully. "I think I'll stay here now. I'll find my way to the hotel."

Matthews put the bag on a desk, awkwardly removed his hat and departed, while the lady sat and waited.

In the inner office, his head in his hands, his elbows on his desk, his brows bent over some papers, sat Jeff, trying to bring cosmos out of the chaos of his affairs. His clerk entered, the card in his hand, wondering whether he had made a mistake. Hell had been let loose in the Development Company for a week, and Mr. Wray, he knew, was in no humor for interruptions. Jeff looked up with a frown.

"Well — what is it?"

"A lady — to see you."

Jeff's head sank into his papers again.

"Tell her I'm busy!" Then he looked up irritably. "What lady? Who is she? I can't see anybody to-day."

"I don't know. She doesn't belong around here." And he dropped the card on the desk.

Jeff picked it up and looked at it with a scowl,

then started in amazement. What did it mean? He rose slowly, his brows perplexed, and put on his coat.

"Tell her to come in," he said. He was still standing in the middle of the room looking at her card when Mrs. Cheyne entered.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LADY IN GRAY

SHE was frankly amused at his bewilderment.

"Well," she said with a smile, "you don't seem very pleased to see me."

"I — it's rather sudden. I wasn't exactly certain it was you." He took her hand mechanically. "What on earth are you doing out here?"

"I've come to see you — traveled two thousand miles to tell you I'm sorry."

Jeff brought forth a chair.

"Sorry? What for? Oh, yes, we quarreled, didn't we? I remember. It was my fault. But I don't understand yet. Are you on your way to the coast?"

"What coast? Oh, no," coolly; "I rather thought I'd reached my destination, but perhaps I'm mistaken."

Jeff was still regarding her curiously, as if he couldn't be quite sure he was not dreaming. He pulled out his swivel chair and sat in it, facing her.

"Now tell me what this means," he insisted rather sternly.

"I've told you. I want to convey the impression

of begging your pardon. Don't I do it? I've tried so hard. Ugh! Such unspeakable sleeping-cars last night! Such a silly little train this morning from the place with the unpronounceable name. I had no idea that friendship could be such a martyrdom!" She sighed. "I think I really deserve something after this."

He found that he was smiling in spite of himself. "You do, I'm sure," he said after a pause. "But I don't bear you any grudge. I expected too much of you, I guess. I've forgotten that long ago. I'm glad to see you."

"Really?" she drawled. "You convey just the opposite idea. You ought to be glad, you know. I've never been so tired in my life. That train! Oh, Jeff, whatever possessed you to live in such an outlandish place?"

"This is where I belong. If Mesa City is outlandish, then I'm outlandish, too."

"Love me, love my dog," she laughed. "I'd have to love you a lot. Perhaps it will improve on acquaintance." She crossed her feet and settled more comfortably in her chair, while Jeff watched her shrewdly.

"You can't mean you want to stay here?" he asked.

"I don't know. That depends on you. I've told you the sentimental side of my journey. Actually I'm a practical young female, with a prudent eye for an investment." And when her companion smiled, "Are you laughing because you think I'm

not practical — or because you think I'm not prudent?"

"I'd hardly call you either. In fact, I don't know what to think. You don't seem to belong, somehow."

"Why not? Once you said I spoke out like Mesa City."

"But you don't look like Mesa City."

"Horrors!" preening her hair, "I hope not."

Jeff leaned back in his chair with folded arms and examined her — his eyes narrowing critically. She had given two explanations of her presence, neither of which in itself seemed sufficient. The real explanation, he was forced to admit, lay in the presence itself. She bore his scrutiny calmly, examining him with frank interest.

"What is it you don't understand?" she asked him, answering the question in his eyes with another. "Me? Oh, you'll have to give it up. There isn't any answer. I'm something between a sibyl and a sphinx. You thought you'd guessed me in New York, but you hadn't, you see. I'm neither what you thought I was, nor what you thought I ought to be. I'm the spirit of Self-Will. I do as I choose. I thought I'd like to see you, and so I came — *Voilà.*"

"I don't know what you can expect here. The accommodations at the hotel ——"

"Oh, I can stand anything now — after your trains ——"

"You'll be bored to death."

"I'm always bored to death. But, then, this place may have the charm of boring me in an entirely new way. After all," she sighed, "I might as well be bored here as at home."

Wray got up without speaking and walked to the window which overlooked the plains. He stood here a moment, his hands behind his back, the look of perplexity deepening on his face. Somehow Rita Cheyne didn't seem accessory to the rather grim background of his thoughts. For days he had been acting the leading part in what now promised to be a tragedy. Rita belonged to satirical comedy or, at the best, to the polite melodrama. Something of this she suddenly read in his attitude, wondering why she had not discerned it before. She got up and went over to him.

"What is it, Jeff? You're changed somehow out here. You seem older, bigger, browner, more thoughtful."

"This is where I work, Rita," he said with a slow smile. "In New York we Westerners only play. I am older — yes, more thoughtful, too. I've had a good deal to worry me ——"

"Yes, I know. I think Cortland Bent has been behaving very badly."

Jeff made a quick gesture of protest.

"I didn't mean that," he said abruptly. "My worries are business worries."

"Oh! I intruded."

"Yes, you did. But I'm glad of it now. I'm

going to Hell about as fast as a man can, but I might as well do it comfortably."

"What do you mean?" she asked in alarm.

"Your relatives, the Bents. They've got me in a corner."

"Yes, I heard. What will be the end of it?"

Jeff ran a finger around his throat with a significant gesture.

"Won't you tell me about it?"

"It wouldn't interest you. It's a long story. They have more money than I have. That's the amount of it."

"I thought you were so wealthy."

"I am. But I can't go up against the whole of Wall Street. They've cost me a lot. If I won this fight I'd be the richest man west of the Missouri River. It isn't over yet." He paced the room violently, beginning to rant, as he still did when to talked of himself. "No, by G—d! not yet. They've got to come to me in the end. They can't get my mine." He went over to his desk and took out a piece of ore. "See that, Rita; that came out of 'Lone Tree' only yesterday. They may get a control of the Denver and Saguache and even of the Development Company, but they can't get the 'Lone Tree.' I reckon I won't starve."

"But how can they get the Development Company?"

"The banks have called my loans—oh, you can't understand. If I don't meet them, the stock will be sold. Bent's crowd will buy it."

"Of course I don't know much about these things, but I was wondering — how much stock is there?"

"Two million and a half. I've borrowed eight hundred thousand dollars."

She looked down, turning the ferrule of her umbrella on the toe of her boot.

"Suppose some one else bought it?"

"I hadn't thought of that. Who?"

"Me."

Jeff started forward in his chair, his eyes blazing — then he took a step or two away from her.

"You?"

She nodded pertly. He turned and looked at her over his shoulder. Then, with a warm impulse, he seized both of her hands in his and held them tightly in his own.

"That's white of you, Rita. You're the real thing. I'll swear you are — the Real Thing — you've got sand, too, a lot of it, and I like you for it. It's worth while getting in a hole to find out who your friends are. I won't forget this soon."

She disengaged her hands.

"Thanks," she said calmly. "Do you agree?"

"Agree? To what?"

"To let me buy that stock?"

He straightened and turned to his desk, uncertainly fingering some papers there. He was silent so long that she repeated the question.

"No," he said at last.

"Why do you say that?"

"I don't want you to."

"I don't understand. In New York you were willing to have me in with you. Why do you object now? Any security your banks will take ought to be good enough for me. Any security my cousin Cornelius Bent wants to buy ought to be worth having."

"It is — to him."

"Then why not to me? — it's all in the family."

He looked at her blankly a moment and then laughed and shook his head.

"No — there's too much risk."

"I expected to risk something."

He sat down in his chair before her and put his hands over hers.

"See here, Rita. You'll have to let me think this thing out and take my own time. I never put my friends into anything I don't believe in myself. If you're looking for an investment here I'll find you something. I know a dozen good things."

"You can't prevent my getting that stock if I want it," she broke in.

"The Amalgamated can."

"I'll go to the General and tell him I insist on having it. He's a little afraid of me."

He laughed. "He ought to be. I am, too." Jeff rose and took up his hat and Rita Cheyne's traveling bag. "There's one thing sure: I'm not going to talk about this any more — not now. You're tired. I've got to get you fixed up somehow. You know I started building a place up in

the cañon, but it's not finished yet. Mrs. Brennan is away. There's nothing for it but a hotel, I guess."

"Oh, I don't care. I'm not going to be discouraged. I warn you I always have my own way — in the end — in all things."

He chose to disregard the significance of the remark and showed her out. On their way up the street the spirit moved him to apologize again.

"There's a bathroom at the Kinney House. I'd better take you there. It's pretty well kept. Camilla stayed there once. I wish she was here."

"You do?" quizzically.

"Why — yes."

"Then why don't you have her here?" she asked suddenly.

A shade passed over Jeff's face. "We went East for the winter," he said slowly. "I had to come back here. My wife likes it in New York. It — it wasn't advisable for her to come."

"Thanks, I knew that before," she said slowly. Further conversation was interrupted by their arrival at the Kinney House, a frame structure at the upper end of Main Street, where it stood in lonely dignity, quite dwarfing its nearest neighbors, which clambered part of the way up the slope and then paused — as though in sudden diffidence before the majesty of its three-storied preëminence. It wore at this time a coat of yellow paint of a somewhat bilious hue, but its cornices, moldings, and the rather coquettish ornaments about the "Ladies

on, for the mere joy of the game, and he had followed her cautiously, aware of his own insufficiency but delighting in the opportunities her society afforded him to even his accounts with Camilla. Both had called their relation friendship for want of a better word, but Jeff knew that friendship had another flavor. The night when he had last visited her he had played his cards and had called that bluff. But to-day he realized that she had seen his raise and had now removed the limit from the game. From now on it was to be for table stakes, with Rita Cheyne dealing the cards.

And what did her amazing financial proposition mean? Could it be genuine? He knew that she was very wealthy — wealthy in the New York way — but it was not in his experience that sentiment and finance had anything in common. If her offers were genuine, her confidence in his financial integrity and in him was extraordinary. If they were not, her confidence in herself was likewise extraordinary.

Jeff smiled to himself a little uneasily. What would Mesa City be saying about the unexplained arrival of a captivating female from New York who sought him out at his office and whose claims upon his society (unless he fled) could not be denied. There was no chance for him to flee, even if he wished, the condition of his business requiring his presence here for at least a few days, and the trunk check in his hand reminded him that he had promised Rita Cheyne her trunk immediately, so that

she might ride with him that very afternoon. What was to be done? Her ingenuity had always surprised him, and her resources were of infinite variety. To tell the truth, he was afraid of her, and was willing for the first time to acknowledge it frankly to himself. She interested him — had always interested him — but it seemed to be more the interest of curiosity than that of any real affiliation. To be with Rita Cheyne was like going to a three-ring circus, where one is apt to lose sight of the refined performance on the stage just in front in bewilderment over the acrobatic feats of the lady in spangles at one side. What was her real reason for coming West to Mesa City? He gave it up and turned in at the office, gave the trunk check to a clerk, and in a moment had taken up his business at the point where Mrs. Cheyne had interrupted him.

Eight hundred thousand dollars! If the Amalgamated took up that stock, General Bent's crowd would have control of the Development Company and the Denver and Saguache Railroad Company. If Rita Cheyne's offers were genuine — if he chose to use her money to redeem that stock — he could place himself on some kind of financial footing, could entrench himself for a long battle over the railroad connections, which he might eventually win. There was a chance. He did not dare to call in Mulrennan to talk the matter over. Pete had been catching at straws for a week, and Jeff knew what his advice would be. His superstitious mind would look on Mrs. Cheyne's visit as a direct

interposition of Providence, as a message and an injunction. Jeff began to think himself mad not to have accepted her proposition at once. It dangled before him temptingly — but he let it hang there like ripe fruit upon the vine, hesitating to reach forth and seize. He could not believe it was real. It was "too aisy," as Pete would have said. Was he losing his nerve? Was it that the last victories of his enemies had sapped some of his old assurance, or had he suddenly developed a conscience? He put his head in his hands and tried to think. If he won his fight he could double Rita Cheyne's money in a year. If he lost — and he had to think of that more and more each day — the stock might not be worth the paper it was written on. Rita knew all this, but she still believed in him — more even than he believed in himself. Women were funny. He couldn't understand, unless she had some motive which had not been revealed to him. There would be a string of some sort to that extraordinary proposition.

He got up at last and sent a message to the Home Ranch, ordering two horses to be sent to his office at three o'clock.

CHAPTER XX

La Femme Propose

THE wagon-road to the "Lone Tree" skirted the mountains for a way and then wound through a nick in the foothills into a level vale of natural parks, meadows, and luxuriant grass, bordered by pines and cottonwoods, beneath which tiny streams meandered leisurely down to the plains below.

Mrs. Cheyne emerged from the scrub-oak delightedly.

"It's like a Central Park for Brobdingnags," she cried. "I feel as though Apache ought to have seven-league horseshoes. As a piece of landscape gardening it's remarkably well done, for Nature is so apt to make mistakes — only Art is unerring." She breathed deep and sighed. "Here it seems Nature and Art are one. But it's all on such a big scale. It makes me feel so tiny — I'm not sure that I like it, Jeff Wray. I don't fancy being an insect. And the mountain tops! Will they never come any nearer? We've been riding toward them for an hour, but they seem as far away as ever. I know now why it was that I liked you — because your eyes only mirrored big things — nobody can have a mountain for a friend without joining the immortal

Fellowship. It makes it so easy to scorn lesser things — like bridge and teas. Imagine a mountain at an afternoon tea!"

Jeff rode beside her, answering in monosyllables. The road now climbed a wood of tall oaks, rock-pines, and spruces, through which the sunlight filtered uncertainly, dappling fern and moss with vagrant amber. Somewhere near them a stream gushed among the rocks and a breeze crooned in the boughs. Rita Cheyne stopped talking and listened for she knew not what. There was mystery here — the voice of the primeval, calling to her down the ages. She glanced at Jeff, who sat loosely on his horse, his gaze on the trail. She had believed he shared her own emotions, but she knew by the look in his eyes that his thoughts were elsewhere. She spoke so suddenly that he looked up, startled.

"Why don't you say something? This place makes me think about Time and Death — the two things I most abhor. Come, let's get out of here."

Apache sprang forward up the trail at the bidding of his mistress, whose small heels pressed his flanks, again and again, as she urged him on and out into the afternoon sunlight beyond, while Jeff thundered after. He caught her at the top of a sand-ridge half a mile away, where they pulled their horses down to a walk.

"What was the matter?" said Jeff. "You rode as if the Devil was after you."

"Oh, no — I'm not afraid of the Devil. It's the mystery of the Infinite. That wood — why don't the dead oak-branches fall? They look like gibbets. Ugh!" She shuddered and laughed. "Didn't you feel it?"

"Feel what?"

"Spooky."

"No. I camped there once when I was prospecting. That stream you jumped was Dead Man's Creek."

"He must be there yet, the dead man. It was like a tomb. Who was he?"

"A soldier. He deserted from Fort Garland and was killed by some Mexicans. They buried him under a pile of stones."

"What a disagreeable place. It's like a cemetery for dead hopes. I won't go back; you'll have to take me around some other way."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I'm afraid of melancholy — I hate unhappiness. I was born to be amused — I *won't* be unhappy," she said almost fiercely. "Why should I be? I have everything in the world that most people want. If I see anything I want and haven't got, I go and get it."

"You're lucky."

She shrugged. "So people say. I do as I please. I always have and always will. You were surprised to see me here. I told you why I came. I wanted to see you. You were the only person in New York who did not bore me to extinction. If it gives me

pleasure to be here, this is the place where I ought to be. That's logical, isn't it?"

"It sounds all right. But you won't stay here long," he said.

"Why not?"

"You couldn't stand it. There's nothing to do but ride."

"I'd rather ride than do anything else."

Jeff looked straight forward over his horse's ears, his eyes narrowing, his lips widening in a smile.

"Well — if you don't see what you want — ask for it," he said slowly.

"I will. Just now, however, I don't want anything except an interest in your business. You're going to let me have it, aren't you, Jeff? You'd take some stranger in. Why not me? I'm the most innocuous stockholder that ever lived. I always do whatever anybody tells me to do."

"You don't realize the situation. I've told you I'm in a dangerous position. With that stock in my possession again, all my holdings would be intact and I might stand a long siege — or perhaps be able to make a favorable compromise — but there's no certainty of it. I don't know what they've got up their sleeves. As it is, I stand to lose the greater part of my own money, but I'm not going to lose yours."

"I don't believe you're going to lose. I'm not quite a fool. Those papers you showed me don't prove anything. The Development Company has two hundred thousand acres of land worth twenty

dollars an acre and the coal fields besides. That's good enough security for me."

"It would be good enough security for any one if we had our connection. I could make you a lot of money." He broke off impatiently. "See here, Rita, don't press me in this matter, I'd rather wait a while. I've got a few days before those notes are due. Something may turn up ——"

"Which will let me out — thanks, I'm not going to be left out. I know what you've done in these mountains and in this country, and I believe in you as much as I ever did. I'd like you to let me help you, and I'm not afraid of losing — but if I do lose, it won't kill me. Perhaps I'm richer than you think I am. I'm willing to wait. You'll be rich again some day, and I'll take my chances. They can't keep you down, Jeff — not for long."

Jeff thrust forth a hand and put it over hers.

"You're solid gold, Rita, and you're the best friend I ever had. I can't say more than that."

She smiled happily. "I've been hoping you'd say that. It's worth coming out here for. I want to prove it, though — and I hope you'll let me."

The road now turned upward toward the railroad grade. As they reached the crest of the hill Jeff pointed to the left at the mills and the smelter buildings hanging tier on tier down the side of the mountain. Below in a depression of the hills a lake had formed, surrounded by banks of reddish earth. The whole scene was surpassing ugly, and the only dignity it possessed was lent by the

masses of tall black stacks, above which hung a pall of smoke and yellow gases. Rita Cheyne gasped. "So that's the bone of contention? I thought it would be something like the New York Public Library or the Capitol at Washington! Why, Jeff, it's nothing but a lot of rusty iron sheds!"

"Yes," he drawled, "we don't go in much for architecture out here. It's what's inside those sheds that counts. We've got every known appliance for treating ore that was ever patented, with a wrinkle or two the Amalgamated hasn't."

They rode around the lake while Wray explained everything to her, and then up the hill toward the trestles and ore-dumps of the "Lone Tree" mine. Wray's struggles for a right-of-way to the markets of the country showed no reflection here. From two small holes in the mountain side cars emerged at intervals upon their small tracks and dumped their loads at the mill, from which there came a turmoil of titanic forces. Jeff offered to show his companion the workings, but she refused.

"No, I think not," she said. "It's too noisy here. I haven't finished talking to you, and I want to ride."

And so they turned their horses' heads into another trail, which descended among the rocks and scrub-oak, after a while emerging at the edge of a great sand-dune which the wind had tossed up from the valley below — a hill of sand a thousand feet high, three miles wide and six miles long, a mountain range in miniature, in which trees, rocks,

and part of a mountain were obliterated. Even the Great Desert had not presented to Rita Cheyne such a scene of desolation. Their horses stopped, sniffed the breeze, and snorted. Jeff pointed into the air, where some vultures wheeled.

Mrs. Cheyne shuddered. "It looks like Paradise Lost. We're not going there?"

"No — I only wanted you to see it. There's a thousand million dollars of gold in that sand-pile."

"Let it stay there. I think it's a frightfully unpleasant place. Why do you show me all these things when all I want to do is to talk?" She turned her horse's head, and they followed a slight trail between groves of aspen trees, a shimmering loveliness of transparent color. "You're not giving me much encouragement, Jeff. You didn't believe in my friendship in New York, but you're trying your best to keep me from proving it here."

"I do believe it now. Didn't I tell you so?"

"Yes, but you don't show it. What do you think my enemies in New York are saying of my disappearance? What will they say when they know I've come out here to you? Not that I care at all. Only I think that *you* ought to consider it."

"I do," he said briefly. "Why do you make such a sacrifice?"

"I never make sacrifices," she said, eluding him skillfully, "even for my friends. Don't make that mistake. I've told you I came because I'd rather be here than in New York. If I heard that your

financial enemies were trying to ruin you, that only made me the more anxious to come. Besides, I had an idea that you might be lonely. Was I right?"

"Yes — I am."

"Was, you mean."

"Yes — was," he corrected. "I've been pretty busy, of course, night as well as day, but after New York this place is pretty quiet."

"Did you miss me?"

"Yes," frankly, "I did — you and I seem to get on pretty well. I think we always will."

"So do I. I've always wondered if I'd ever meet a man who hadn't been spoiled. And I was just about ready to decide that he didn't exist when you came along. The discovery restored my faith in human nature. It was all the more remarkable, too, because you were married. Most married men are either smug and conceited, or else dejected and apprehensive. In either case they're quite useless for my purpose."

"What is your purpose?" he asked.

"Psychological experiment," she returned glibly. "Some naturalists study beetles, others butterflies and moths. I like to study men."

"Have you got me classified?"

"Yes — you're my only reward for years of patient scientific endeavor. The mere fact that you're married makes no difference, except that as a specimen you're unique. Do you wonder that I don't want to lose you?"

"I'm not running away very fast."

"No. But the fact remains that you're not my property," she answered, frowning. "I can't see — I've never been able to see — why you ever married, any more than I can see why I did. I'm quite sure that you would have made me an admirable husband, just as I'm sure that I would have made you an admirable wife. You don't mind my speaking plainly, do you? I'm thinking out loud. I don't do it as a rule. It's a kind of luxury that one doesn't dare to indulge in often. I have so many weak points in which you are strong, and I have a few strong ones in which you are weak, we could help each other. You could make something of me, I'm sure. I'm not as useless as I seem to be; sometimes I think I have in me the material to accomplish great things — if I only knew where to begin, or if I had some one who is in the habit of accomplishing them to show me how. That is why I wanted to help you. It struck me as a step in the right direction."

"It was," he ventured, "only it was too big a step."

"One can't do big things by halves," she insisted. "Money is the only thing I have that you lack. It is the only thing that I can give — that's why I want to give it — so that you can use it as a measure of my sincerity. I'd like to make you happy, too——" She paused, and her voice sank a note. "Why should you be unhappy? You don't deserve it. I know you don't. I haven't any patience with women who don't know a good thing when they have it."

"Perhaps I'm not as good a thing as I seem. You yourself are not beyond making mistakes, Rita."

"Oh, Cheyne? I didn't make that mistake, Cheyne did. He thought marriage was a sentimental holiday, when everybody nowadays knows that it's only a business contract. Don't let's talk of Cheyne. I can still hear the melancholy wail of his 'cello. I want to forget all of that. You have helped me to do it. I've been looking at you from every angle, Jeff Wray, and I find that I approve of you. Your wife has other views. She married you out of pique. You married her because she was the only woman in sight. You put a halo around her head, dressed her up in tinsel, set her on a gilt pedestal, and made believe that she was a goddess. It was a pretty game, but it was only a game after all. Imagine making a saint of a woman of this generation! People did — back in the Dark Ages — but the ages must have been very dark, or they'd never have made such a mistake. I've often thought that saints must be very uncomfortable, because they were human once. Your wife was human. She still is. She didn't want to be worshipped. She hadn't forgotten my cousin Cortland, you see ——"

"What's the use of all this, Rita?" said Wray hoarsely. "I don't mind your knowing. Everybody else seems to. But why talk about it? Let sleeping dogs lie."

She waved her hand in protest. "One of the dearest privileges of friendship is to say as many

disagreeable things as one likes. I'm trying to show you how impossible you are to a woman of her type, and how impossible your wife is to you."

"I'd rather you wouldn't."

"She marries you to prove to my cousin Cortland that he isn't the only man in the world, and then spends an entire winter in New York proving to everybody that he is. There hasn't been a day since you left that they haven't been together, riding, motoring, going to the theatre and opera. It has reached the point when people can't think of asking one of them to dinner without including the other. If you don't know all this, it's time you did. And I take it as a melancholy privilege to be the one to tell you of it. It's too bad. No clever woman can allow herself to be the subject of gossip, and when she does she has a motive for what she's doing or else she doesn't care. Perhaps you know what Mrs. Wray's motive is. If you have an understanding with her you haven't done me the honor of telling it."

"No," he muttered, "I'm not in the habit of talking of my affairs. You know we don't get along. No amount of talking will help matters."

"What are you going to do?"

Wray's eyes were sullen. Rita Cheyne chose to believe that he was thinking of his wife. But as he didn't reply at once she repeated the question. It almost seemed as though her insistence annoyed him, but his tone was moderate.

"What is it to you, Rita?"

She took a quick glance at him before she replied.

"It means a good deal to me," she went on more slowly. "To begin with, I haven't any fancy for seeing my best friend made a fool of by the enemies of his own household. It seems to me that your affairs and hers have reached a point where something must be done. Perhaps you've already decided."

"I've left her — she's in love with Cort Bent. I have proof of it. We made a mistake, that's all."

"Of course you did," she said. "I'm glad that you acknowledge it. Are you going back to New York?"

"I haven't decided. That depends on many things. She thinks I'm in love with you."

They had come to a piece of rough ground sown with boulders and fallen trees, through which their horses picked their way carefully. Rita Cheyne watched the broad back of her companion with a new expression in her eyes. He had never seemed so difficult to read as at this moment, but she thought that she understood and she found something admirable in his reticence and in his loyalty to his wife. In a moment the trail widened again as they reached the levels, and her horse found its way alongside his.

"She thinks you're in love with me? What does she know about love? What do I know about it? or you? Love is a condition of mind, contagious in extreme youth, but only mildly infectious later

in life. Why should any one risk his whole future on a condition of mind? You feel sick but you don't marry your doctor or your trained nurse because he helps to cure you. Why don't you? Simply because you get well and then discover that your doctor has a weak chin or disagreeable finger ends. When you get well of love, if you marry to cure it, there's nothing left but Reno. I don't believe in love. I simply deny its existence — just as I refuse to believe in ghosts or a personal Devil. I resent the idea that your wife should believe you're in love with me. You find pleasure in my society because I don't rub you the wrong way, and I like you because I find less trouble in getting on with you than with anybody else."

"You're a cold-blooded proposition, Rita," said Wray smiling.

"Yes — if it's cold-blooded to think — and to say what one thinks. But I'm not so cold-blooded that I could marry one man when I liked another — a man with whom I had no bond of sympathy. Cheyne was the nearest approach I could find to the expression of a youthful ideal — people told me I was in love with him — so I married him. Of course, if I had had any sense — but what's the use? I've learned something since then. To-day I would marry — not for love, but for something finer — not because of a condition of mind or a condition of body, but because of a stronger, more enduring relation, like that between the lime and sand that build a house. I'd marry a man because

I wanted to give him my friendship and because I couldn't get on without his friendship, and if the house we built would not endure, then no marriage will endure."

"You mean, Rita," Wray interrupted with sober directness, "that you'd marry me if you could?"

She flushed mildly. "I didn't say so. I said I would marry for friendship because it's the biggest thing in the world. I don't mind saying I'd marry you. It's quite safe, because, obviously, I can't."

Jeff looked at her uncertainly and then laughed noisily.

"Rita, you're a queer one! I never know when the seriousness stops and the fun begins."

She smiled and frowned at the same time.

"The fun hasn't begun. I mean what I say. Why shouldn't a woman say what she thinks? A man does. I shock you?"

"No — it's part of you somehow. Speak out. I'll tell you whether I believe you or not when you're through."

"I suppose I'm what people call a modern woman. If I am, I'm glad of it. Most women fight hard for their independence. I've simply taken mine. I say and do and shall always say and do precisely what comes into my mind. I've no doubt that I'll make enemies. I've already succeeded in doing that. I'll also probably shock my friends — but I've thrown away my fetters and refuse to put them on again because some silly prig believes in living up to feminine traditions. I haven't any sympathy

with tradition. Tradition has done more to hinder the enlightened development of the individual than any single force in history. Tradition means old fogyism, cant and hypocrisy. I never could see why, because our fathers and mothers were stupid, we have to be stupid, too. Imagine an age in which it was not proper to cross one's legs if one wanted to — an age of stiff-backed chairs, to sit in which was to be tortured — when every silly person denied himself a hundred harmless, innocent amusements simply because tradition demanded it! We live in an age of reason. If a woman loves a man, why shouldn't she tell him so?"

CHAPTER XXI

L'homme Dispose

JEFF WRAY had listened in curiosity, then in amazement, his eyes turned toward the Saguache Peak, whose snow-cap caught a reflection of the setting sun. He had accustomed himself to unusual audacities on the part of his companion, but the frankness of her speech had outdone anything he could remember. When he turned his look in her direction it was with a shrewd glance of appraisement like the one she felt in the morning when she had first appeared in his office. As they reached an opening in the trees Jeff halted his horse and dismounted.

"It's early yet. Let's sit for a while. Throw your bridle over his head. He'll stand."

Mrs. Cheyne got down, and they sat on a rock facing the slope, which dropped away gently to the valley. Jeff took out his tobacco and papers and deftly rolled a cigarette, while Rita Cheyne watched him. He offered to make her one. but she refused.

"You've got me guessing now, Rita," he said with a laugh. "More than once in New York I wondered what sort of a woman you really were. I thought I'd learned a thing or two before I came

away, but I'll admit you've upset all my calculations. I've always known you were clever when it came to the real business of disguising your thoughts. I know you never mean what you say, but I can't understand anybody traveling two thousand miles to create a false impression. You know as well as I do that all this talk of yours about friendship is mere clever nonsense. I know what friendship means, and I guess I know what love means, too, but there isn't any way that you can mix them up so that I won't know one from the other."

"I'm not trying to mix them up."

"You're trying to mix *me* up then." He took her hand in his and made her look at him. "You've been playing with me for some time. I was a different kind of a breed from anything you'd been used to in New York, and you liked to wind me up so that you could see the wheels go 'round. You've had a lot of fun out of me in one way or another, and you still find me amusing."

She stopped indignantly.

"Don't you believe in me?"

"No. The things you say are too clever to be genuine for one thing. You're too cold-blooded for another."

"One can't think unless one is cold-blooded."

"When a woman's in love she doesn't want to think."

"I'm not in love — I simply say I'll marry you, that's all."

"You're talking nonsense."

"I never was saner in my life. I want you to believe in my kind of friendship."

"Eight hundred thousand dollars' worth of friendship is not to be sneezed at."

"Stop, Jeff, you're brutal. I won't listen."

"You've got to. I've listened to you. Now you must listen to me, and I'm going to make you play the game with your cards above the table. So far as I can understand, you hold the New York record for broken hearts to date, and I was warned that you had strewn your wrecks along the whole front of Central Park East. But I suppose I was too much flattered when you showed me attention to take to my heels. I liked you and I wanted you to like me. Perhaps we both liked each other for the same reason — with the same motive — curiosity. You put me in odd situations just to see what I'd do. I liked to be with you. You purred like a kitten in the sun, and I liked to hear you, so I was willing to perform for that privilege. You claimed me for a friend, but you tried your best to make me lose my head. That's true, you can't deny it. I didn't lose it, because — well, because I had made up my mind that I wouldn't. I don't know whether you were disappointed or not, but I know you were surprised, because you weren't in the habit of missing a trick when you played that game."

She withdrew her hand abruptly and turned her head away. "That isn't true," she murmured. "You must not speak to me so."

"I've got to. Every word of what I say is true — and you know it."

"It's not true now."

"Yes, it's true now. I know how much you really care about me. You've got so much in life that you're never really interested in anything except the things you can't get. You like me because you know I'm out of your reach and you can't have me even if I wanted you to. You're a great artist, but I don't think you really ever fooled me much. You like to run with a fast and Frenchy set just because it gives your cleverness a chance it couldn't have with the Dodos, but you don't mind being talked about, because your conscience is clear; you like the excitement of running into danger just to prove your cleverness in getting out of it. See here, Rita, this time you're going too far. I suppose I ought to feel very proud of the faith you put in me and your willingness to trust yourself so completely in my hands. I guess I do. But things are different with me somehow. I told you I was going to Hell pretty fast, and I'm not in a mood to be trifled with."

"I'm not trifling." She had caught a sinister note in his voice and looked up at him in alarm.

"There's a way to prove that."

"How?"

"This!"

He put his arms around her, turned her face to his, and held it there while he looked a moment into her eyes. But she struggled and held away

from him, suddenly discovering something unfamiliar in the roughness of his touch and the expression in his eyes.

"Let me go!" she cried, struggling desperately to be free.

"You'll kiss me."

"No — never, not after that."

"After what?"

"The way you speak to me. You're rough ——"

"I'll not let you go until you tell me why you came here. If you love me, you'll look in my eyes and tell me so."

"I don't love you," she panted, still struggling. "I never shall. Let me go, I say!"

He laughed at her. Her struggles were so futile. Art could not avail her here. She realized it at last and lay quietly in his arms, her eyes closed, her figure relaxed, while he kissed her as he pleased.

"Will you tell me you love me?"

"No. I loathe you."

Then she began struggling again; he released her, and she flung away and stood facing him, her hat off, hair in disorder, cheeks flaming, her body trembling with rage and dismay.

"Oh, that you could have touched me so!"

"Why, Rita ——" he began.

"Don't speak to me ——" She moved toward the horses. "I'm going," she asserted.

"Where?"

"To Mesa City."

"How can you? You don't know the way."

"I'll find the way. Oh ——" She stamped her foot in rage and then, without other warning, sank on a rock near by and burst into tears.

Jeff Wray rose uncertainly and stared at her, wide-eyed, like other more practiced men in similar situations, unaccountably at a loss. He had acted on impulse with a sense of fitting capably into a situation. He watched her in amazement, for her tears were genuine. No woman was clever enough to be able to cry like that. There was no feminine artistry here. She was only a child who had made the discovery that her doll is stuffed with sawdust. He realized that perhaps for the first time he saw her divested of her artifice, the polite mummery of the world, the real Rita Cheyne, who all her life had wanted to want something and, now that she had found what it was, could not have it just as she wanted it. It was real woe, there was no doubt of that, the pathetic woe of childhood. He went over to her and laid his hand gently on her shoulder. But she would not raise her head, and it almost seemed as though she had forgotten him. He stood beside her for some moments, looking down at her with a changing expression. The hard lines she had discovered in his face were softened, the frown relaxed, and at his lips there came the flicker of a smile.

"I — I'm sorry," he said at last. "I — I made a mistake, Rita. I made a mistake."

The sobs began anew.

"How — how could you — treat me so?"

There was no reply to that, so he stood silently and waited for the storm to pass. Meanwhile he had the good taste not to touch her again. But as the sobs diminished he repeated:

"I made a mistake, Rita. You made me think——"

"Oh!" only. Her face appeared for a moment above her arms and then instantly disappeared. "You're odious!"

"Why, Rita," he said with warm frankness, "how could I believe anything else? All your talk of friendship; why, you asked me to marry you. What did you expect of me?"

"Not that — not what you did — the way you did it."

"You forgave me once."

She raised her head, careless of the tears which still coursed.

"Yes, I forgave you then. But not now. I can't forgive you now. No man ever kissed a woman the way you kissed me unless he is mad about her — or despises her"

"Despises——"

'Yes. You might as well ask me to forgive you for murdering my brother. You've killed something inside me — my pride, I think. I can never — never forget that."

She got up and turned her back to him, fingering for her handkerchief. She had none. He slowly undid the kerchief from around his own neck and put it in her hand.

"Don't cry, Rita."

"Cry?" She wheeled around, still staunching her tears. "No, I'll not cry. I was a fool to cry. I'll not cry any more. I cried because — because I was disappointed — that any one I trusted could be so base."

"I'm not so dreadful as all that. You must admit ——"

"I'll admit nothing — except that I made a mistake, too. It hasn't been a pleasant awakening. I know now what those kisses meant."

Wray's incomprehension was deeper.

"I wish *I* did," he said. "I was sure they wouldn't do you any harm. You wouldn't have been so frank with me if you hadn't been pretty sure of yourself."

"That was my mistake. I was so sure of myself that I didn't think it necessary to be sure of you." And while Jeff was trying to understand what she meant, she went on:

"Those were not *my* kisses. They were impersonal — and might have been given to any woman — that is, any woman who would allow them. Each of them a separate insult — Judas kisses — treacherous kisses — kisses of retaliation — of revenge ——"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"You've been using me to square your accounts with your wife — that's all," scornfully. "As if you didn't know."

He flushed crimson and bit his lips. "That's not true," he muttered. "What does it matter to my

wife? Why should she care who I kiss — or why?"

"It doesn't matter to her, I suppose," she said, slightly ironical; "she is her own mistress again, but it does to you. Curiously enough you're still in love with your wife. She's in love with somebody else. Naturally it wounds your self-esteem — that precious self-esteem of yours that's more stupendous than the mountain above you. She hurts you, and you come running to me for the liniment. Thanks! You've come to the wrong shop, Mr. Wray."

Jeff's brows darkened. He opened his mouth as though to speak, but thought better of it. As Rita Cheyne took up the bridle of her horse and led him to a rock that she might mount, Jeff interfered.

"One moment, Rita. I think we'd better have this thing out. I'm beginning to understand better the width of the breach between us — it's widened some to-day — and I don't believe you're going to try to make it up to-morrow. I'm sorry, but I'm not going to have any more misunderstandings, either. I want you to forgive me if you can. I've cared for you a good deal — enough to make me sorry you were only fooling. Things don't seem to be going my way, and I've had lot of thinking to do that hasn't made me any too cheerful. I don't seem to see things just the way I did. This fight has made me bitter. I've got everything against me — *your* world, the organized forces of your world

against a rank outsider. I belong to the people who work with their hands. I've always been pretty proud of that. I went East and mixed up with a lot of your kind of people. I had a good time. They asked me to their houses, gave me their wine and food. They knew what they were about. They had need of me, but no matter what they said or did they never for a moment let me forget what I'd come from. You were the only one of all that crowd who tried to make me feel differently. Was it any wonder that I was grateful for it?"

"Your gratitude takes a curious form."

He held up a hand in protest.

"Then you — you liked me because I said just what I thought whenever I thought it, but even with you I never forgot it wasn't possible for us ever to reach an understanding of perfect equality. You played with life — you had been taught to. Life is a kind of joke to you. People are incidents, only important when they give you amusement. I've been more important than others for that reason — because I gave you more amusement than others, but there's never been any doubt that I was only an incident. To me life is a grim problem — I've felt its weight, and I know. To-day you talked of making a marriage as I would speak of making a cigarette. It was too cold-blooded even for humour ——"

"You refuse me then, do you, Jeff?" she laughed. But he made no reply to her banter.

"I've done with marriage," he went on. "I

tried it and I failed, just as you tried it and failed, but I'm not ready, as you are, to make a joke of it. Failures are not the kind of things I like to joke about. You joke because joking makes you forget. I'm not trying to forget. I couldn't if I wanted to. I've learned that out here. My wife can do as she likes. If she wants to marry Cort Bent I'll give her a divorce, but as for me, I've done with it — for good."

Jeff had sunk to the rock beside her, his head in his hands, while she stood a little way off looking down at him. Their relative attitudes seemed somehow to make a difference in her way of thinking of him. In spite of the light bitterness of her mood, she, too, felt the weight of his thoughts.

"Do you mean to say," she murmured, half in pity, half in contempt, "that you still love your wife as much as this?"

But he made no reply.

"It's really quite extraordinary," she went on with a manner which seemed to go with upraised brows and a lorgnon. "You're really the most wonderful person I've ever known. This is the kind of fidelity one usually associates with the noble house-dog. I'm sure she'd be flattered. But why will you give her a divorce? Since you're not going to marry — what's the use?"

He rose and went to the horses. "Come," he said, "it's getting late. Let's get back."

She refused his help, mounted alone, and silently they rode down the slope through the underbrush,

where after a while Jeff found a trail in the open.

"Does this lead to Mesa City?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Good-by, then." She flourished her hand and, before he realized it, was off and had soon disappeared from sight. He urged his horse forward into a full gallop, but saw that he could not catch her. Apache was the faster horse, and his own animal carried too much weight. So after a few miles he gave up the race, walked his winded horse, and gave himself up to his thoughts.

The exercise had refreshed his mind, and he was able to think with calm amusement of the little comedy in which he had just been an actor. What a spoiled child she was! He couldn't understand why he had ever been afraid of her. It was only pity he felt now, the pity of those tears, the only really inartistic thing Rita had ever been guilty of, for her face had not been so pretty when she cried. And yet they appealed to him more strongly than any token she had ever given him. What did they mean? He had hurt her pride, of course — he had had to do that, but somehow his conscience didn't seem to trouble him much about the state of Rita's heart. Love meant something different to him from the kind of cold, analytical thing Rita Cheyne was capable of. If it hadn't been for those tears! They worried him.

As he reached the edge of a wood he caught a glimpse of her just disappearing over the brow of

a hill, half a mile away. So he urged his horse forward. It wouldn't do to have her ride into Mesa without him. He rode hard and suddenly came upon her kneeling at the border of a stream, dipping his bandana into the water and touching her eyes. When she saw him she looked up pertly, and he saw that she was only a child washing its face.

"Hello!" she said. "I was waiting for you. Do you see what I'm doing? It's a rite. Do I look like Niobe? I'm washing my hands — of you."

Jeff got down and stood beside her.

"Do be sensible, Rita."

"I am — am I clean? You haven't a powder puff about you — have you?"

"You're going to tell me you forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive. If you think there's anything to forgive, I'll forgive — of course." She got up from her knees, wiping her face, sat down on a tree trunk, and motioned him to sit beside her.

"Jeff," she said, "I've a confession to make. You know what it is, because you're cleverer than you have any right to be. I don't love you really, you know, and I'm pretty sure it isn't in me to love any one — except myself. It has always made me furious to think that I couldn't do anything with you. From the first I set my heart on having you for myself, not because I wanted to laugh at you — I couldn't have done that — but because you were in love with your wife."

"Why — do you hate her so?"

"I don't. I don't hate any one. But she irri-

tated me. She was so self-satisfied, so genuine, so handsome — three things which I am not." She waited for him to contradict her, but Jeff was frowning at vacancy.

"Just to satisfy my self-esteem — which is almost as great as yours, Jeff Wray — I would have moved mountains to win, and I even let you drag my pride in the dust before I discovered that I couldn't. I die pretty hard, but I know when I'm dead."

"Don't, Rita; you and I are going to be better friends than ever."

"No, Jeff, I'm going East to-morrow. I don't want to see you. To see you would be to remind me of my insufficiencies."

"You've made a friend."

"No," shaking her head, "that won't do. It never does. I may have tried to deceive you, but I know better. Friendship is masculine — or it's feminine. It can't be both. I'm going away at once. I'm not going to see you again."

"Oh, yes, you are. To-morrow we'll ——"

"No. I'd go to-night if there was a train. I want you to do one thing for me, though. Will you?"

"If I can."

"That money — the money for that stock. I want to leave it with you — to use or not to use as you think best. I've got a great deal of money — much more than is good for me."

Jeff shook his head.

"No, Rita, no. I can't do that. If I'm going to lose, I'll lose alone."

"But if you win?" she turned and gave him her hand. "You will. I've sworn you will. And here's luck on it." Instead of clasping her hand, as she intended he should, he raised it to his lips and kissed it gently — as under different conditions he might have kissed her lips. She looked down at the top of his head and closed her eyes a moment, but when he looked up she was smiling gaily.

"You're a good sport, Rita," he said.

"Yes," she said coolly, "I believe I am."

They rode into Mesa City slowly. The valley was already wrapped in shadow, but above them the upper half of Saguache Peak was afire with the sunset. The evening train was in and had puffed its way up to the yard. There was a crowd at the post-office waiting for mail, and scattered groups here and there were chatting with the arrivals. Wray and Mrs. Cheyne climbed the slope to the Kinney House, where a cowboy from the Home Ranch was waiting for their horses. They dismounted and went indoors to the office, where a solitary lady in a dark dress was signing her name to the hotel register. At the sound of their voices she turned and straightened, suddenly very pale and tense. And then, before Jeff could speak, turned again quickly to the clerk and said quietly:

"If you'll show me the way up at once, please, I'd like to go to my room."

CHAPTER XXII

PRIVATE MATTERS

JEFF followed Camilla's departing back with blank bewilderment, too amazed to utter a word. Rita Cheyne looked at Jeff's face and then laughed.

"Act Three will now begin," she said gaily. "It's really too good, Jeff. But it's time for the lady-villain to die. I'm off stage now, so good-by."

She gave him her hand, and he took it mechanically.

"I'll see you to-morrow," he said gravely.

"No, this is good-by. There isn't any to-morrow for us. I won't see you, Jeff. I think perhaps you won't want to see me now."

"This will make no difference," he stammered. "Don't you see — I've got to make *her* understand."

"You mean — my reputation. She'd never understand that. You'll be wasting time. Don't bother. I'm going to Denver in the morning. No, not a word ——"

He tried to hold her, but the clerk came down at this moment, so, with a last flourish of the hand, she sped past him and up the stairs.

Jeff stood for a moment in the middle of the floor,

irresolute. Then he turned to the desk and asked the number of Mrs. Wray's room.

"Parlor B, Mr. Wray, but she told me to say that she did not want to be disturbed."

Jeff hesitated, and then, with a frown: "That doesn't matter," he growled. "I'll explain. I'm going up," and he made his way to the stairs.

The room, he remembered, was at the front of the house. He had occupied it before they built his sleeping quarters in the office building. He found the door readily and knocked, but there was no response. He knocked again. This time her voice inquired.

"It's Jeff, Camilla," he said. "I must see you at once. Let me in, please."

Another long pause of indecision. He might have been mistaken, but he fancied he could hear Rita Cheyne's light laugh somewhere down the corridor. He did not want a scene — as yet his and Camilla's misfortunes had not reached the ears of Mesa City. He was still debating whether he would knock again or go away when the key turned in the lock and the door was opened.

"Come in," said Camilla, and he entered. She had removed her hat, and the bed and pillow already bore traces of her weight.

"I'm sorry to intrude," he began awkwardly.

"Shut the door," she suggested. "Perhaps it's just as well that people here shouldn't know any more of our private affairs than is necessary."

He obeyed and turned the key in the lock. His

wife had moved to the window and stood, very straight and pale, waiting for him to speak. She seemed, if anything, slimmer than when he had seen her last, and her hair, which had fallen loosely about her shoulders, was burnished with the last warm glow from Saguache Peak. He had never thought her more beautiful, but there were lines at her eyes and mouth which the growing shadows of the room made deeper.

"I suppose you're willing to believe the worst of me," he began, "and of her. Perhaps I ought to tell you first that she only came here this morning — that she's going away to-morrow ——"

"It isn't necessary to explain," she interrupted. "I hope Mrs. Cheyne won't go on my account. I'm going, too, in the morning. Under the circumstances, I'm sorry I couldn't have waited a day or two, but I had to see you at once."

"You had to see me? Has something gone wrong in New York? What is ——?"

"Oh, no," wearily. "Everything in New York is all right. I've had everything packed in boxes and have given up the apartment at the hotel."

Jeff's brows tangled in mystification.

"You've given up the apartment? Why?"

"I'm not going to live there any more. I'm going to Kansas — to Abilene. I'm very tired, Jeff, and I need a rest."

"Camilla!" He pushed an armchair toward her and made her sit. "You do look as if you — you're not sick, are you?"

"Oh, no — just tired of everything." Her voice was low, as it always had been, but it had no life in it. "Just tired of being misunderstood. I won't explain, and I don't expect you to. I couldn't listen if you did. I came here because I had to come, because no matter what our relations are it was my duty to see you at once and tell you something of the greatest importance."

He stood behind her chair, his fingers close to her pallid cheeks, gently brushed by the filaments of her hair, the perfume of which reached him like some sweet memory. He leaned over her, aching for some token that would let him take her in his arms and forget all the shadows that had for so long hung about them. But as she spoke, he straightened, glowering at the wall beyond her.

"It isn't — it's nothing — to do with you — and Cort Bent ——?"

"Oh, no, not at all. I haven't seen Cort for some time. It's about — about the General."

"General Bent?" Jeff gave a quick sigh, paced across the room, and then turned with a frown. "I'm not interested in General Bent," he muttered. "For me he has stopped being a person. He's only a piece of machinery — a steel octopus that's slowly crushing me to bits. I'd rather not talk of General Bent."

"Is it as bad as that?" she murmured, awe-stricken.

"Yes — they've pushed me to the wall. I'm still fighting, but unless I compromise or sell the

mine ——" he stopped and straightened his great frame. "Camilla, don't let's talk of this. I know you're tired. I won't stay long. Just tell me what you mean about going back to Abilene."

She clasped her hands nervously, glad of the chance to postpone her revelation, which seemed to grow more difficult with each moment.

"I can't stand the life I'm living, Jeff. I can't take any more from you. I've done it all spring because you wanted me to, but I can't live a lie any longer. Those rooms, that luxury, the servants, the people about me, they oppressed me and bore me to the earth. I have no right to them — still less now that things are going badly with you. You wanted me to keep the place we'd made — to make a larger place for your name in New York. I hope I've made it, but it has cost me something. I'm sick of ambition, of the soulless striving, the emptiness of it all. I can't do it any longer. I must go somewhere where I can be myself, where I don't have to knuckle to people I despise, where I don't have to climb, climb, climb — my ears deaf to the sneers and the envy of the scandal-mongers, and open only for the flattery which soothes my self-esteem but not — no, nothing can soothe the ache at the heart."

"What has happened, Camilla? I understood you had made many new friends."

"Yes, some new friends — also, some new enemies. But that hasn't bothered me. It's the lying I had to do — about you — the excuses I have had

to make for being alone, the dates I have set for your return, lies — all lies — when I knew you were not going to return, that you had deserted me and left me only your money as a bribe. I couldn't do it any longer. I wrote you all this. You thought I didn't mean what I said — because I had your money — your merciless money, to gratify my pride in my pretty body. It has come to the point where your money is an insult — as much of an insult as the dishonor you put on me."

"Dishonor? I can't have you associate that name with Mrs. Cheyne," he blurted forth.

She smiled and then gave a hard, dry, little unmirthful laugh.

"Oh, you mistake my meaning. I wasn't thinking of Mrs. Cheyne. I was selfish enough to be still thinking of myself."

"I don't understand."

She got up and walked to the window, leaning her face against the pane to soothe with its coolness the heat of her brow. "I was thinking of my own dishonor — not yours — I have nothing to do with yours. To be doubted as you have doubted me — to know that you could believe me capable of dishonoring you — that is dishonor enough."

"You mustn't forget that you gave me cause," he said hoarsely. "What kind of a man do you think I am? You married me for a whim — because another man wouldn't have you. I forgave you that because I was willing to take you at any price.

That was my fault as much as yours. It was what came after ——"

He came up behind her, his voice trembling but suppressed.

"Do you think I'm the kind of man to tolerate the things between you and Cort Bent? I was a fool once. I believed in you — I thought no matter how little love you had in your heart for me that you'd have enough respect for yourself. Do you think I could stand knowing that my servants had seen you in his arms?"

She flashed around at him, breathless, paler than ever, clutching at the window-sill behind her for support. "Who — who told you this?"

"Greer — my valet at the hotel," he snarled, "when I discharged him and came here."

"He said ——?"

Jeff caught her by the elbows — brutally — and held her so that he could look into her eyes.

"It's true — isn't it? Answer me!"

She gazed at him wide-eyed, and now for the first time he saw how ill she looked. Even at that moment he was sure that pity and love and a desire for possession were still the feelings that dominated him. She could not stand the gaze of his eyes. They seemed to burn through her, so she lowered her head.

"Yes," she admitted brokenly, "it's true — I was in his arms."

A sound came from his throat — a guttural sound half-choked in the utterance, as he dropped her,

turned violently and in a stride was at the door. But as the key turned in the lock, she started forward and clutched him by the sleeve.

"Wait," she whispered piteously. "You must. You can't go now. You've got to know everything."

"I think I've had enough. I'm going." He turned the knob and opened the door, but she leaned against it and pushed it shut.

"You've got to listen. I have some rights still — the right every woman has to defend her name."

"If she can," he sneered.

"I can — I will. Will you listen?" He shrugged his shoulders and walked past her to the window. Camilla faced him, beginning slowly, breathlessly. "It was when we first came to New York that it began — that day when you and your — you and General Bent came in from downtown. Cortland was there — I — I thought I had forgotten him. I was happy with you. I was beginning to believe that, after all, we hadn't made a mistake. But you were away all day and I was lonely. The city was so vast, so unfriendly. I had no right to be lonely but I was. I was bewildered by all the magnificence and homesick for Mesa City. That day Cort Bent came in I had a fit of the blues. He brought back all the old story — and told me how you stole the mine."

Jeff laughed aloud. "So he told you that — did he? For sympathy?" he sneered.

"It revolted me," she persisted. "It revolts

me still. I was new to modern business methods then. I can't like them now, but I've learned to keep silent. He asked me to forgive him the past, and I did. The spell of romance was over me still. He told me that he loved me more than ever and that he would not give me up. I thought — I thought I loved him, too ——"

"You *thought!* You *knew!*" he said immoderately. "You've always loved him."

"No, no. It wasn't that," she pleaded. "It wasn't love, Jeff. I learned that soon enough. It was only pity ——"

"And where was your pity for me?"

"Don't, Jeff — let me finish. Whatever my feelings for you then, whatever they are now, I was true to you in word and deed."

"When you were in his arms?" He laughed harshly.

"He took me in his arms. He tried to kiss me on the lips, but I would not let him. I've never let him. I broke away and threatened to ring if he followed me — and then — and then you came in. That's all, Jeff — all — and it's the truth." She faced him bravely, her eyes seeking his. He glared at her madly, but could not stare her down. It was one of those tragic moments when all the future hangs on the flicker of an eyelash. Jeff's gaze fell first.

"I would have come back here," she went on. "I asked you to leave New York with me. You wouldn't go. Instead of that you threw us together

more and more. Why, I don't know, unless it was because you did not care."

"I did care," he muttered.

"You did not care," she insisted. "You had met Rita Cheyne then ——"

"It was because *she* saw what I did," he asserted. "It was because ——"

"Don't explain," she said. "I'm not asking *you* to explain or to exonerate her. It's too late for that. But I cannot bear to have you think such dreadful things about me, cruel things, things that hurt — hurt me here ——"

She put her hand to her breast and swayed. He sprang to her side and caught her in his arms as she fell, lifting her like a child and carrying her to the bed, terror-stricken at the coldness of her hands and face. He rang the bell, and then with bungling fingers loosened her collar and dress, whimpering the while like a child. "Camilla, my girl, don't look so white. Open your eyes. I believe you, dearie; I've always believed you. Look at me, Camilla. I know you're straight. I didn't mean it. I was cruel to you. I wouldn't hurt you for the world. I love you. You're *my* girl — *my* girl."

There was a commotion at the door of the adjoining room, which suddenly flew open, and a figure in a trailing silk kimono glided in, pushed him aside abruptly, and put a silver brandy flask to Camilla's lips. It was Mrs. Cheyne.

"I was next door," she explained jerkily. "I

heard. I couldn't help it. The partitions are so thin." And then, with sudden authority: "Don't stand there like a fool. Bring some water — quickly," and when he had obeyed: "Now bathe her temples and give her brandy. She'll be all right in a minute. When I go, get a light. But she mustn't see me here." And, before he was even aware of it, she had vanished like a wraith.

The housemaid brought a lamp, put it on the table, and hovered anxiously in the background, but Camilla's eyes had opened.

"Mrs. Wray is sick," Jeff began.

But Camilla had already drawn herself up on one elbow and gently pushed him away.

"I — I'm all right now. I can't imagine what made me feel so queerly. I've never been — I've never fainted before."

"A little more brandy?"

"No, not now. Who —? Wasn't there some one else in here? I thought — I saw some one in pink — and smelled a perfume. I must have been dreaming."

"Lie back on the pillow and rest, Camilla, dear. You're played out. The doctor will be here in a minute."

"I don't want a doctor. I'm all right." With an effort she straightened and sat on the side of the bed. "I remember — I was telling you ——"

"Don't, Camilla. I don't want to hear. I believe you. It's all a mistake." He bent over her and tried to take her in his arms.

But she held up her hand and gently restrained him. "No — no," she said shaking her head. "Don't try to soothe me. That doesn't mean anything. I know. Shadows like these are not brushed away so quickly. Sit there, Jeff, by the window and listen. There's something else I must tell you — I should have told you at once. It's what I came here for, but I didn't seem to have the courage."

"No, not to-night."

"I must — it won't keep. You must listen." Her eyes pleaded, and so he sank into the rocking chair, leaning forward eagerly. She took up the handbag beside her on the table and fumbled tremblingly at the lock.

"It's something which concerns General Bent and you — no, not business, Jeff — something personal — something dreadfully personal — which has nothing whatever to do with your business relations, and yet something which seems to make your hatred of each other all the more terrible. It — it seems very hard for me to tell you, because it's something you have never liked to speak about — something that has always made you very unhappy."

"Why, what do you mean, Camilla?" he asked.

"You must let me tell you in my own way, because it will be hard for you to realize. I must show you that there is no mistake — no chance of a mistake, Jeff. Two weeks ago at the hotel in New York I was reading the letters in the old tin box and looking at the photographs. They were in the drawer of your desk. I've never spoken of

them to you or looked at them since we were married — but you were not there to see them and — I — I didn't think you'd mind. I had them on your desk when Mrs. Rumsen came in. She saw the photograph of your father. She — she had one just like it in her album at home ——"

"She knew him, then?" eagerly.

"Yes. I've brought both photographs with me." She took them out of the handbag with trembling hands and gave them to him.

He got up, took them to the light and held them side by side. "Yes, yes," he muttered, "they are the same — the very same. There's no doubt about that." And then, in a suppressed voice, "You know who he is?"

"Yes, Jeff. Mrs. Rumsen and I know — no one else — not a soul else. It's your secret. We couldn't tell. No one can or will but you." Her voice had sunk almost to a whisper. "It's — it's the General — Jeff — General Bent."

Outwardly Jeff gave no sign of unusual disturbance — a slight tightening of his thumbs upon the pictures, a slight bending of the head that his eyes might be surer of their vision. But to Camilla, who was watching him timidly, he seemed to grow compact, his big frame to shrink into itself and his eyes to glow with a strange, unfamiliar fire.

"General — Bent — General — Bent," he repeated the words huskily, as if they were a formula which he was trying to commit to memory. "It can't be true?"

"Yes, Jeff, it's true. Mrs. Rumsen identified the letters. There's no doubt — none."

"I can't believe — why, I'd have *felt* it — Camilla. I've always said I'd know him if I saw him."

"You didn't — but have you thought? You look like him, Jeff. You *look* like him."

"Yes — it's strange I didn't think of that." And then suddenly, "Does *he* know?"

"No — he won't unless you tell him."

He looked up at her with dumb, uncomprehending eyes and sank in his chair again, still grasping the photographs.

"I must think," he groaned, "I've got to think — what to do. I've hated him so — all these long years. I hate him now — not because he's my — my father — but because — he's himself."

"Stop, Jeff, you mustn't — you mustn't speak so."

"It's true," raising his bloodshot eyes to hers. "Why should I care? Did *he* care for the atom he's put into the world to float about without a name to land on any dung-hill? I'll pay him back for that, by God! I'm not his son. The only thing I want of his blood is his cruelty. I'll take that and use it when I can — on him and his."

"You musn't, Jeff. It's horrible. I can't stand hearing this."

At the touch of her hand he stopped, got up and paced the length of the room and back again in

grim silence, his lips working, while she watched him, fearful of another outburst.

"I must think this thing out, Camilla — by myself. I don't know what I'll do." And then suddenly, "Where is he now?" he asked harshly.

"In Denver — at the Brown Palace Hotel. They came West before I did with the Janneys, Gretchen, and Mrs. Rumsen. They came in a private car."

"To be in at my finish," he muttered bitterly. "I can't seem to think, Camilla. It's all so monstrous — it staggers me."

He stopped pacing the floor and looked at her, suddenly realizing how ill she had been, and contrite and self-accusing he fell on his knees at her feet and put his arms around her.

"Camilla! I shouldn't have let you tell me all this to-night. You were not strong enough. I've been brutal to you — to forget what you were suffering. You must sleep. My heart has been aching for you all these long months. I'll take care of you and make you strong and well again. You're not going back to Abilene, Camilla."

Slowly she disengaged her hands.

"You must go now, Jeff. I — I *am* tired. But all I need is rest. I couldn't have slept until I told you. It has preyed on me like a poison. I can't influence you, though. You must use your own judgment as to what you'll do, but I pray you'll do nothing rash."

"You must not go back to Abilene. There's

much to be explained, Camilla — you must promise not to go away! I want to speak to you about Rita Cheyne."

She rose from her seat on the bed with a kind of wistful dignity.

"I can't promise anything, Jeff. Go, please. I want to be alone."

He looked at her a moment, pleading, and then turned without a word and went out. She heard his heavy steps go down the noisy hall, heard them again on the porch below and on the boardwalk through the village until they were engulfed in the gloom of the night — Jeff's night of anguish, battle, and temptation.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE INTRUDER

MEANWHILE, in Parlor A, next door, a lady in a pink kimono, who seemed unusually diminutive and childish in her low-heeled bedroom slippers, pottered about uneasily, walking from window to window, jerking at the shades to peer out of doors, and then pulling the shades noisily down again; opening the hall door, looking down the corridor, walking out a few steps and then coming rapidly back again, to light a cigarette which she almost immediately put out and threw into the stove; coughing, dropping things — and then standing tense and alert to listen, acting altogether in a surprising and unusual manner. But the sound of voices in the adjoining room persevered, now loud — now less loud, but always perfectly audible through the thin, paper-like partition. At last, as though in sudden desperation, without removing her clothes, or even her slippers, she crawled quickly into the bed and pulled the covers and pillow over her head, lying still as a mouse, but tense and alert in spite of herself and — in spite of herself — listening. She emerged again in a while, half smothered, like a diver coming to the surface, listening again, and

then with an exclamation quickly got out of bed, her fingers at her ears, to open the hall door presently and flee down the corridor.

From her vantage point — in an empty room — she heard Jeff's rapid footsteps go past, and only when she heard them no longer did she go back to Parlor A. She closed the outer door and locked it, sat down in an armchair, leaning forward, her head in her hands, staring at a pink rose in the ornate carpet, deep in thought. In the room next door all was quiet again. Once she thought she heard the sound of a sob, but she could not be sure of it, and after a while the light which had shone through the wide crack under the door disappeared. For a long time she sat there, immovable except for the slight, quick tapping of one small foot upon the floor.

At last she rose with an air of resolution and touched the bell. To the clerk, who answered it in person, she asked for telegraph blanks and a messenger. He looked at his watch.

"The telegraph office is closed."

"Well, it will have to be opened. This is a matter which can't wait until morning. The operator must be found."

"We *might* get a message through." He looked at the bill she had put in his hand. "Yes, I'm sure we can."

"And you might send me up some tea and toast." She shut the door, went to her trunk, took out her writing pad, put it on the table, turned up the wick

of the lamp, and began writing. She finished a letter and sealed it carefully. When the telegraph blanks came she wrote two rather lengthy messages. One of the telegrams was addressed to the cashier of the Tenth National Bank of Denver — the other telegram and the letter were addressed to Lawrence Berkely at the Brown Palace Hotel in the same city. When she had given the messenger his instructions, she sank in her chair again with a sigh, and, with a tea cup in one hand and a piece of buttered toast in the other, sat facing the door into Parlor B. Her face wore a curious expression, partly mischievous, partly solemn, but there was at times a momentary trace of trouble in it, too, and when the tea cup was set aside she stretched her arms wearily and then brought them down, lacing her fingers behind her neck, putting her head back and closing her eyes as though in utter, soul-racking weariness. Suddenly she rose, passing the back of one wrist abruptly across her brows, and prepared to go to bed.

* * * * *

Camilla awoke late and ordered breakfast in her room. It was not bodily fatigue which she felt now. That seemed to have passed. It was mental inertia, which, like muscular stiffness, follows the carrying of too heavy a burden. A part of her burden she still carried, and even the brightness of the Colorado sun, which dappled the tinsel wall paper beside her, failed to rekindle the embers of old delights. From [illegible] windows she could see the fine sweep of [illegible] range as it extended its great half-

moon toward the northern end of the valley, where it joined the main ridge of the Continental Divide; from the other window the roofs of the town below her, Mulrennan's, the schoolhouse, and Jeff's "Watch Us Grow" sign, now dwarfed by the brick office building which had risen behind it. It seemed a hundred years since she had lived in Mesa City, and to her eyes, accustomed to elegant distances, the town seemed to have grown suddenly smaller, more ugly, garish, and squalid. And yet it was here that she had lived for five years — five long years of youth and hope and boundless ambition. In those days the place had oppressed her with its emptiness, and she had suffered for the lack of opportunity to live her life in accordance with the dreams of her school-days; but to-day, when she seemed to have neither hope nor further ambition, she knew that the early days were days of real happiness. What did it matter if it had been the bliss of ignorance, since she was now aware of the folly of wisdom? She could never be happy anywhere now — not even here. She lay back on her pillows and closed her eyes, but even then the vision of Rita Cheyne intruded — a vision of Jeff and Rita Cheyne riding together over the mountain trails.

She was indeed unpleasantly surprised when, a few moments later, there was a knock upon the door at the foot of her bed; and when she had put on a dressing gown the door opened suddenly, and there stood Rita Cheyne herself, smiling confidently and asking admittance.

Camilla was perturbed — so much so, in fact, that no words occurred to her. The door had opened outward toward Rita Cheyne, who held its knob. It was, therefore, obviously impossible for Camilla to close it without Mrs. Cheyne's assistance. This, it seemed, the visitor had no intention of giving, for she came forward on the door-sill and held out her hand.

"Mrs. Wray," she said gently, "I want to come in and talk to you. May I?"

"This is — rather surprising," Camilla began.

"Yes," she admitted, "it is. Perhaps I'm a little surprised, too. I — I wanted to talk to you. There are some things — important things ——"

By this time Camilla had managed to collect her scattered resources. "I'm not sure," she said coolly, "that our friendship has ever been intimate enough to warrant ——"

Rita put one hand up before her. "Don't, Mrs. Wray! It hasn't. But you'll understand in a moment, if you'll let me come in and talk to you."

Camilla drew her laces around her throat and with a shrug stood aside. "I hope you'll be brief," she said coldly. "Will you sit down?"

But Mrs. Cheyne had already sat in a chair with her back to one of the windows, where her face was partially obscured by the shadows of her hair. She pulled her kimono about her figure, clasped her fingers over her knees, and leaned forward, eagerly examining her companion, who had seated herself uneasily upon the side of the bed.

"You *are* handsome!" she said candidly, as if settling a point in her own mind which had long been debatable. "I don't think I ever saw you handsomer than you are at the present moment. Trouble becomes you, it gives a meaning to the shadows of your face which they never had before."

Camilla started up angrily. "Did you come here to comment upon my appearance?"

"No," said Rita suavely. "I can't help it — that's all. Did you know that you have been the means of destroying one of my most treasured ideals? You have, you know. I've always scoffed at personal beauty — now I remain to pray. It's a definite living force — like politics — or like religion."

"Really, Mrs. Cheyne ——!"

"Please let me talk — you would if you only knew what I'm going to say. My remarks may seem irrelevant, but they're not. They're a confession of weakness on my part — an acknowledgment of strength on yours. You never liked me from the first, and I don't think I really was very fond of you. We seemed to have been run in different moulds. There's no reason why we shouldn't have got along because — well, you know I'm not half bad when one really knows me; and you! — you have everything that most people like — you're beautiful, cultured, clever and —and quite human."

Camilla made a gesture of impatience, but Rita went on imperturbably. "You're handsome, gentle and human — but you — you're a dreadful fool!"

And then, with a laugh, "Please sit down and don't look so tragic. It's true, dear, perfectly true, and you'll be quite sure of it in a moment."

Anger seemed so futile, Camilla was reduced to a smile of contempt. "I'm sure I can't be anything but flattered at your opinions, Mrs. Cheyne." But, in spite of herself, she was conscious of a mild curiosity as to whither this remarkable conversation was leading.

"Thanks," said Rita with mock humility. "There's only one thing in the world more blind than hatred, and that's love. Because you think you hate me, you'd be willing to let slip forever your only chance of happiness in this world."

"I don't hate you," said Camilla icily, "and luckily my happiness is not in any way dependent on what you may say or do"

"Oh, yes, it is," said Rita quickly. "I'm going to prevent you from making a mistake. You've already made too many of them. You're planning to go away to Kansas when your husband positively adores the very ground you walk on."

Having shot her bolt, like the skillful archer she put her head on one side and eagerly watched its flight. Camilla started up, one hand on the bedpost, her color vanishing.

"You — you heard?"

"I — I know."

"*He* told you."

"Who? Jeff?" She leaned back in her chair

and laughed up at the ceiling. "Well, hardly. I don't mind people telling *me* they adore the ground *I* walk on, but——"

"How did you know?" Camilla glanced toward the door and into Mrs. Cheyne's room, a new expression of dismay coming into her eyes. "You heard what passed in here — last night?"

"Yes — something — I couldn't help it."

"How could you — have listened?" Camilla gasped.

"I tried not to — I tried to make you stop — by dropping things and making a noise, but I couldn't. You didn't or wouldn't hear — either of you. Finally I had to go out of the room." She rose with a sudden impulse of sympathy and put her hand on Camilla's shoulder.

"Oh, don't think everything bad about me! Can't you understand? Won't you realize that at this moment I'm the best friend you have in the world? Even if you don't admit that, try to believe that what I say to you is true. Why should I risk a rebuff in coming in here to you if it wasn't with a motive more important than any hurt you can do to me? What I say to you is true. Your husband loves you. He's mad about you. Don't you understand?" Camilla lowered her eyes, one of her hands fingering at the bed-cover, suddenly aware of the friendly pat on her shoulder. At last she slowly raised her head and found Rita Cheyne's eyes with the searching, intrusive look that one woman has for another.

"Why should *you* tell me this?" she asked. Mrs. Cheyne turned aside with a light laugh.

"Why *shouldn't* I? Is happiness so easily to be had in this world that I'd refuse it — to a friend if it was in my power to give? I can't see you throwing it away for a foolish whim. That's what it is — a whim. You've got to stay with Jeff. What right have you to go? What has he done to deserve it? I flirted with him. I acknowledge it. What is that? I flirt with every man I like. It's my way of amusing myself." She straightened, and, with a whimsical smile which had in it a touch of effrontery, "The fact that he still loves you after that, my dear," she said, "is the surest proof of his devotion."

Camilla looked away — out of the window toward the "Watch Us Grow" sign, the symbol of Jeff's ambition, and her eyes softened. She got up and walked to the window which faced the mountains.

"If I could only believe you — if I only could," she said, and then, turning suddenly, "Why did you try to make Jeff fall in love with you?"

Rita shrugged. "Simply because — because it was impossible. I'm so tired of doing easy things. I've always done everything I wanted to, and it bored me. I owe your husband a debt. I thought all men were the same. Do you really think there are any more like Jeff?"

Camilla watched her narrowly, probing shrewdly below the surface for traces of the vein of feeling she had shown a moment before. What she dis-

covered was little, but that little seemed to satisfy her, for, after a pause, in which she twisted the window cord and then untwisted it again, she came forward slowly, took Rita by both hands and looked deep into her eyes.

"Why did you come out here?"

It was no time for equivocation. Camilla's eyes burned steadily, oh, so steadily. But Rita did not flinch.

"I thought Jeff was lonely. I thought he needed some one, and so I came out in the Bents' private car as far as Denver. I left them there and came on alone. I wanted to help him — I'm trying to help him still — with my sympathy, my money — and — and such influence as I can use to make his wife realize her duty to him and her duty to herself."

It was an explanation which somehow did not seem to explain, and yet curiously enough it satisfied Camilla. If it was not the whole truth, there was enough of it that was nothing but the truth. She felt that it would not have been fair to ask for more. Rita was not slow to follow up this advantage. She gave a quick sigh, then took Camilla by both shoulders. "You musn't go away to Kansas, I tell you. You've never loved anybody but Jeff. Cortland knows it, and I know it. I've known it all the while. A woman has a way of learning these things. If you leave him now there's no telling what may happen. He needs you. He can't get on without you. They're trying to crush the life out of him in this soulless war for the smelter,

and they may succeed. He's pushed to the limit of his resourcefulness and his endurance. Flesh and blood can't stand that strain long. He needs all his friends now and every help, moral and physical, that they can give him. There's no one else who can take your place now. No one to stand at his side and take the bad with the good. You've had your half of his success — now you must take your half of his failure. You're his wife, Camilla! Do you understand that? His wife!"

A sob welled up in Camilla's throat and took her unawares. She bent her head to hide it — and then gave way and fell on the bed in a passion of tears.

Rita watched her for a moment with a smile, for she knew that the tears were tears of happiness, then went over and put her arms around Camilla's shoulders, murmuring gently:

"You're not to blame, Camilla — not altogether — and it's not too late to begin again. He needs you now as he has never needed you before. It's your opportunity. I hope you see it."

"I do, I do," came faintly from the coverlid.

"You must see him at once. Do you understand? Shall I send for him?"

"Yes, soon." Camilla sat up and smiled through her tears, drew Rita down alongside of her, put her arm around her and kissed her on the cheek.

"I understand you now. I'm sorry — for many things. I want to know you better, dear. May I?"

"Yes," said Rita calmly, "if you can. Perhaps then you might explain me to myself. But I'm

going to New York again soon — something tells me you are to stay here."

"I will stay here now," said Camilla proudly, "if Jeff wants me. Are you sure — sure — he ——"

Rita held her off at arm's length, quizzically—tantalizing her purposely.

"No, silly. He loves me, of course — that's why I'm presenting him to you." Then she leaned forward, kissed her on the cheek, and rose quickly.

"It's pretty late. I must catch the eleven o'clock train. I have a lot to do. I'm going into my own room."

There was a knock at the outer door. Camilla answered it and received a note from the clerk.

"From Mr. Wray's office. There's no answer."

She opened it hurriedly, while Rita watched.

"Dear Camilla" (it ran): "I'm leaving suddenly by the early train for Denver on a business matter which to me means either life or death. For the love of God don't leave me now. Wait until I return. I'm going to the Brown Palace Hotel and will write you from there.

"JEFF."

She read through the hurried scrawl twice and then silently handed it to her companion.

"You must follow, Camilla — at once — with me," said Mrs. Cheyne.

CHAPTER XXIV

GRETCHEN DECIDES

LAWRENCE BERKELY was doing scout duty in the neighborhood of the seat of war, keeping closely in touch with Wray by wire code. Although he had a room at the Brown Palace Hotel, he went elsewhere for his meals, and since the arrival of General Bent's party he had eluded the detection of Cornelius Bent, Curtis Janney, or Cortland. He had been advised by a brief wire from Gretchen Janney of the date of her departure from New York and had noted the arrival of his business enemies with mingled feelings. In response to his note to her room Gretchen had stolen away and met him quietly in one of the hotel parlors, where, unknown to Curtis Janney, they had renewed their vows of eternal fidelity.

Gretchen was, of course, familiar with Larry's position as a business rival of her father's pet company, and she had thought it best, since Larry's departure from New York, to keep their engagement a secret from her parents. She had heard from him regularly, and distance, it seemed, had made no difference in the nature of her feelings for him, but she knew from her father's disappointment at Cortland Bent's defection that the time to take

her parents into her confidence had not yet arrived.

It had not occurred to Curtis Janney to think of Lawrence Berkely's attentions seriously, but Gretchen knew that her mother, at least, had breathed a sigh of relief when Larry had left New York. Mrs. Janney had questioned her daughter anxiously, but Gretchen had answered in riddles, and in the end had succeeded in convincing her that marriage was the last thing in the world she was thinking of. Gretchen was a little afraid of her father. Once or twice he had expressed himself rather freely as to the kind of man he expected his daughter to marry, from which it was clear that his list of eligibles did not include Lawrence Berkely. She had written all of this tearfully to Larry, so that when she reached Denver he decided that matters had reached a crisis which demanded some sort of an understanding with Janney père. The clandestine meetings, which rather appealed to Gretchen's sense of the romantic, made Larry unhappy. He had nothing to be ashamed of and saw no reason why he had to court the woman he loved under cover of darkness. So he made up his mind to settle the thing in his own way.

In this crisis it had occurred to Gretchen to enlist Mrs. Cheyne's services in their behalf, for Rita had always been a favorite of her father's; but an evening or two after her arrival in Denver that lady had mysteriously disappeared from the hotel, only leaving word that she had gone to visit

friends in the neighborhood and would advise General Bent of her future plans. No one but Larry, with whom she had been talking, had for a moment suspected that the "friends" in the neighborhood were only Jeff, and, though she had not bound Larry to secrecy, both duty and discretion demanded his silence.

Larry's position was difficult, but when he discovered that nothing was to be gained by keeping his movements hidden from Cornelius Bent he took the bull by the horns and boldly sent up his card to Curtis Janney's suite. He was so full of his own affairs that Mr. Janney's possible misconception of the object of his visit had not occurred to him. He was welcomed cordially — so jovially, in fact, that for a moment he was taken off his guard.

"Well, Berkely, by George! glad to see you. Rather a surprise to find us all out here invading your own country, eh?"

Larry sat rather soberly, refused a cigar, and expressed well-bred surprise.

"I can't imagine anybody wanting to leave Braebank in April," he said.

"Well, I didn't want to, Berkely — I'm doing a little scientific farming this summer — but we had to come out on this smelter business — the General and I ——" He stopped and puffed rapidly at his cigar. "It's too bad — really — I'm sorry, sorry, but I think Wray made a mistake. I like Wray, Berkely. He's got stuff in him, but he overleaped

himself in this smelter business. It's a pity he thought he had to fight us, but you've got to admit we gave him every chance."

"I didn't come to see you about the smelter business, Mr. Janney," said Berkely rather quietly, "but on a matter of my own — a personal — a private matter."

Janney's face grew grave.

"A private matter?"

"Yes, sir." Larry closed his lips firmly for a moment, and then came to the point without further words. "Mr. Janney, I suppose I should have spoken to you before I left New York. Our business relations seemed to make it difficult. But the very fact that we can't be friends in business makes it necessary for me, at least, to be honest with you in this other matter."

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"I want to marry your daughter, sir, that's all," said Larry with the suddenness of desperation.

"Gretchen? My daughter?" Janney said, explosively. He rose, with one hand on the back of his chair, and glared at Larry as though he doubted his sanity. "You want to marry Gretchen?" Then he laughed — and Larry discovered in that laugh wherein Janney and General Bent had points of contact. Janney took three long strides to the window, then wheeled suddenly. "You must be crazy. My daughter — marry *you?*"

Larry had risen and met Janney's impertinent scrutiny with some dignity.

"Yes, sir; I'm not aware of anything in my family, my connections, my prospects, or my character which can be found objectionable. Your daughter cares for me ——"

"Why, you insolent young fortune-hunter!"

"Wait a moment!" and Larry's voice dominated. "You'll speak to me as one gentleman does to another — or you'll not speak to me at all." He took up his hat from the table, and then, more evenly, "I take it, you refuse your consent?"

By this time Curtis Janney's usual poise had completely deserted him.

"Refuse — my consent? Well, rather!"

He went to the door through which Berkely had entered. But instead of opening the door Janney turned and put his back to it.

"See here, young man, you don't like my language. Perhaps you'll like it less when I'm through talking. Colorado seems to breed big ambitions. I know nothing of your family and care less. But I do know something of your prospects. Inside of forty-eight hours you won't have prospects of any kind. You're going to be blotted out. Do you understand? I've made other plans for my daughter — and I'm not in the mood to listen to any silly romantic nonsense from her or any far-sighted propositions from you. Your proposal is impudent sir, d — d impudent — the proposition of a desperate man who, failing to win by fair means ——"

"Will you open the door, sir?" said Larry, now white with rage. "If not, I'll find means to open

it myself." He took a step forward, and the two men glared into each other's eyes not a pace apart. There was no mistaking Larry's determination, and Mr. Janney's surprise was manifest. This was not the manner of the fortune-hunters he had met. Somewhat uncertainly he stood aside, and Berkely put his hand on the door-knob.

"I did you an honor in consulting you, sir. It's a pity you couldn't appreciate it. In the future I'll act on my own initiative. Good afternoon."

And, before the older man had even realized what the words meant, Larry had opened the door and was gone. He hurried down the corridor, still trembling at the meaning of Janney's insults, which had touched his Southern pride. For Gretchen's sake it would have been better if he could have kept himself under control, and he realized that he had lost every chance of getting Curtis Janney's permission and approval. But that did not daunt him. He had acquitted his mind of a responsibility, and he was glad that in the future there could be no misunderstanding. If he could not marry Gretchen with the approval of her family, he would marry her without it.

Halfway up the block above the hotel on Seventeenth Street Larry stopped, able for the first time to review more calmly the incidents of the last half hour. What was it Curtis Janney had said about his prospects? In forty-eight hours he would be wiped off the earth. That meant Jeff, too. He had a sudden guilty sense of shock, that in his selfish

absorption in his own affairs he had for the moment forgotten Jeff and the business of the Company. Forty-eight hours! That was important information — and Janney had let it slip in anger — there was no doubt about that. What did it mean? That all the Amalgamated Company's wires were laid, and the only thing left was to touch the button which would blow the Wray interests to pieces?

It looked that way, and yet Larry still hoped. The rails of the Saguache Short Line would be joined to those of the D. & C. to-morrow. Much depended on Symonds. Larry hurried over to the offices of the Denver and California and emerged later with a look of satisfaction. Symonds was still General Manager and was still loyal. Within thirty-six hours, at his orders, a locomotive and one passenger car from the D. & C. yards at Pueblo would carry Clinton, Symonds, Mulrennan, Judge Weigel, and other stockholders of the Development Company from Pueblo over the line to Saguache, establishing their connection at Pueblo in accordance with Jeff's agreements with the road. It would take some queer construction of the law for Jeff's enemies to get around that. Larry knew that it meant a long fight, one which lack of money might lose in the end, but he assured himself that he could establish a nice legal point which would be worth fighting for. The calling of Jeff's loans by the banks was a more dangerous matter. Larry had hoped that this could have been arranged, but only a small amount of the money had been forth-

coming, and where Jeff was going to raise the rest of it Providence only knew!

When Larry reached his room at the hotel he found a brief note from Gretchen:

"I have heard about everything. I shall never speak to father again. You must marry me at once, Larry. I can't stand the suspense any longer. Mother is here with me, but I'm going to get away somehow. Meet me at the Shirley at ten o'clock."

Larry smiled and kissed the penciled scrawl rapturously. "God bless you, I'll do it — Gretchen, dear," he said to himself.

That was a busy evening for Larry. It was six o'clock when he wrote a line to Gretchen and rang for a page, to whom he gave careful instructions — also, some money. Then he sat at his desk and with his code sent a long wire to Jeff. At half-past six he was dressing carefully in the intervals between packing a suit case and 'phoning to a legal friend of his, Dick Wetherall, about a minister and a license. At seven-thirty he dined with Wetherall. At eight he received Rita Cheyne's mysterious wire. At nine he found the cashier of the Tenth National Bank at his home and planned for the taking up of the Development Company's notes and arranging to deposit Mrs. Cheyne's money to Jeff Wray's account on the following morning. At ten he met Gretchen at the Shirley Hotel, and, at half-past ten, had married her.

* * * * *

In response to Larry's first telegram and speeding

eastward on the early train, Jeff Wray read all this astonishing news in the sheaf of telegrams handed him at the station by Ike Matthews. His brow lifted, and the hard lines at his mouth relaxed in a smile. Good old Larry! He tried to conjure a vision of Curtis Janney's face as he heard the news. Larry was carrying the war into the enemy's camp with a vengeance.

It took Jeff longer to decipher the second telegram:

"Mrs. Cheyne has arranged with her Denver agents -- deposit eight hundred thousand dollars your credit Tenth National to-morrow morning. Await instructions."

It seemed incredible. When had Rita done this? The grim lines that his long night's vigil had seared at the corners of his mouth grew deeper, but his eyes glowed with a sombre fire. There was still an even chance to win — for Larry was holding the fort awaiting reinforcements, and Rita Cheyne had restored the break in Jeff's line of communication. The astonishing information in Larry's last wire seemed to clear his mind of the doubts which had assailed it all night long. The possibility of success now gave his own affairs a different complexion. He could never have told the truth to General Bent (Jeff couldn't think of him as a father) unless he won the fight for the independence of the Saguache Smelter. Jeff was no man to come cringing in the hour of failure at the feet of his enemy, asking immunity on the strength of such a relationship as that which existed between them. It had been

clear to Jeff all night long that if he lost his fight he could never face General Bent with the truth. That was the real bitterness of defeat.

But if he won? The long years of dishonor through which he had struggled, without a name, without kindred, without friends, loomed large before him — mute, merciless years of struggle, privation, and emptiness. If he won, there was more than one victory to be gained in this fight, a moral victory as well as a physical one — the triumph of an eternal truth, the vindication of a forgotten wrong. If he won he would tell General Bent the truth — not as a son to a father, but as one merciless enemy to another, asking no quarter and giving none.

The only connection for Kinney at Saguache was with the later train, but Jeff had arranged for a motor-car which took him over the Pass and landed him at Kinney in time for the twelve o'clock train for Denver, where he arrived at six o'clock that evening. Larry met him at the station, smiling broadly.

"I think we've put a spoke in their wheel, Jeff," he laughed. "But we must keep dark. To-morrow morning when the banks open you're going to take up that stock, then we're going to call on the General."

"Is everything all right?"

"Yes, Symonds is standing pat, but they don't know it. The new General Manager comes in to-morrow, but Symonds's orders will go through first. That train will run, Jeff — sure."

"Poor old Larry! a fine honeymoon you're having! Where's your wife?"

"At the Wetherall Ranch. Went out there last night. Her mother has been out to see her. It looks as though they might come around. It's too bad I had to go against them just now, but Mr. Janney forced my hand, and I had to. You understand, don't you, Jeff?" And, explaining as they went, Berkely followed Jeff out of the station, into a motor-car that was awaiting them.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CRISIS

ONE of the rooms in Janney's suite had been turned into an office for General Bent, and here it was that all the conferences between the officers of the Amalgamated Reduction Company and their underlings had taken place. The big men of Denver had all called to pay their respects to the bigger man from the East, and some of them had taken part in the business of reorganizing the Denver and California and its subsidiary companies.

But in spite of the conditions which had made Bent's control of the railroad possible and the money the crowd would make out of it, everybody in this intimate circle knew that the real object of the General's financial operations was the fight of the Amalgamated Reduction Company for the ownership of the Saguache Smelter. The reorganization of the Denver and California had now been completed, and this morning orders had gone forth removing Clinton, Symonds, and all the old crowd from the active management of the road.

General Bent sat at the end of the long desk table in conference with Curtis Janney, Cortland Bent, and a youngish-oldish, keen-eyed man in a

cutaway coat and white waistcoat. This was Henry McCabe of Denver — attorney for the Amalgamated — the shrewdest lawyer west of the Missouri River, and one of the shrewdest east of it. In front of McCabe on the desk was a leather portfolio from which a number of papers protruded. Behind him sat a clerk who had been taking down in shorthand his questions and the replies of two men at the farther end of the table. These men were roughly dressed, and, though at the present moment each of them smoked one of Curtis Janney's remarkable cigars, they sat aloof and uncomfortable on their gilt chairs, assuming attitudes of ease they were far from feeling. One of the strangers was Max Reimer, the man who had discovered the lost vein in the "Lone Tree" mine. The other was Fritz Weyl, one-time barkeeper of Pete Mulrennan's saloon in Mesa City.

McCabe's examination had hardly been concluded when two cards were brought in by a page and handed to Cortland Bent. He glanced at them, and then, without comment, laid them on the table before his father.

"H m! He's here now," muttered the General, staring grimly. "He's saved us the trouble of sending for him." He tossed the cards on the table and rose. "There's nothing more you wanted to ask, was there, McCabe?"

"No, sir, nothing. I know all I need to."

"I thought so. Will you take these men down-[illegible] But have them within call — I may need

them. Have Harbison handy, too. Curtis, you'll stay, of course — and you, Cort." Then to the waiting servant, "Show these gentlemen up."

When Wray and Berkely entered, General Bent had resumed his chair at the head of the table, and Cortland and Curtis Janney sat on either side of him. The General's head was bent forward in its customary pose, his shaggy brows lowered so that his eyes were scarcely visible, but in the smile that twisted one end of his thin lips Berkely read a sardonic confidence in the outcome of the interview. On entering the room Wray fixed his wide gaze on General Bent, his eyes gleaming strangely, and kept it on him as though fascinated, until, at a word from Cortland Bent, he sank into a chair beside Berkely. Aside from this civility, no amenities passed. General Bent had sunk back in his arm-chair, coolly swinging his glasses by their cord, while he keenly eyed Berkely, who had begun talking. Curtis Janney, trying to bury his personal animosities in the present issue, folded his stout arms resolutely and leaned forward upon the table.

"We understand, General Bent, that it is you — representing Eastern interests — who have obtained a majority of the stock of the Denver and California Railroad Company. Am I correctly informed?"

General Bent's head dropped the fraction of an inch. "Your information is correct," he said shortly.

"As general counsel for the Saguache Short Line," Berkely went on, "I am here to inform you

that, in accordance with a contract entered into in March of last year, the Denver and California made certain traffic arrangements with my Company conditional upon the completion of the Saguache Short Line upon a specified date. My company accepted these conditions and has succeeded in carrying out to the letter the terms of its agreements ——"

"One moment, Mr. Berkely," put in the General with a vague attempt to be humorous, "if I may ask, what *is* the Saguache Short Line? A telegraph, stage, or railroad company?"

Wray's jaw set, and he glared angrily, but Berkely only smiled.

"A railroad company, sir," he said with suave directness, "controlling a right of way from Pueblo to Saguache — the most direct line from the Saguache to the market. Our tracks are laid, our signals in place, our stations built, and this morning we are advised that the Denver and California is running its first train through from Pueblo to Saguache!"

The three men started, and Berkely grinned.

"I may add that in addition to Mr. Clinton (who at ten o'clock this morning had not yet retired from the presidency of your road), the train also carries other officers of your company as well as stockholders of mine. A lunch has been provided at the northern terminus of the road, and a spirit of harmony dominates the occasion — one which I'm sure you'll admit is noteworthy in every particular."

General Bent's brow twitched ominously. "I hope, Mr. Berkely, you'll come to the point without delay," he said.

"Willingly. The Saguache Short Line has fulfilled its part of the contract. The present officers of your company are willing to carry out theirs. The object of our visit was merely to reassure ourselves of your friendly disposition — the friendly disposition of the newly elected officers of your road — and to arrange with all proper haste a practical schedule for the operation of the line."

Larry paused and sank back in his chair with a smile. General Bent had risen and was leaning forward over the table toward Berkely, his face a thunder-cloud.

"You want a schedule, do you?" he growled, his voice deepening. "Well, I'll give you one — I'll give it to you now, and it won't take a great while, either. As long as I'm in control of the Denver and California Railroad Company not a wheel shall turn on your little jerk-water line within a mile of Pueblo. That's my answer to your proposition. Our yard limit marks your terminus — do you understand? Get your ore there if you can find any," he finished brutally.

But Berkely refused to lose his temper.

"You're aware, of course," he said coolly, "that such a policy is likely to prove expensive?"

"You'll have to show that."

"I think we will. But I can't believe that ycu repudiate this contract," said Larry, tapping a paper with his forefinger.

"I didn't make that contract. I would never have made it. The courts will pass on its validity."

"Then this is final?"

"Absolutely. Is there anything more you want to say?"

"I think that's all, General Bent," said Berkely, rising. "I had hoped you would have been willing to meet us in a fair spirit. Failing to discover that — either in your attitude or your demeanor — I suppose there is nothing else to be said."

"One moment," interrupted the General, sinking back in his chair with an effort at self-control. "Sit down, please. There's something more to be said — something which you both may be interested to hear." And he addressed his remarks directly to Wray. "I can't say that I've watched your efforts to put your plans through without some interest, Mr. Wray. Under other circumstances I may say that I would have been compelled to a kind of admiration for your fruitless perseverance. It's all the more remarkable in the face of the obstacles with which you had to contend. But we are fully informed as to your actual financial strength, and I think the time has come when we may draw aside the veil and speak frankly. Mr. Berkely informs me that he intends to proceed against the Denver and California Railroad Company. To do this, of course, he must have the proper authority. Are you sure that he can get it?"

Larry smiled. "I think so."

"To do so he requires, does he not, a majority vote

of the Denver and Saguache Railroad Company as well as that of the Short Line — those two companies and the Development Company, as I understand it, being in a way dependent one upon the other?"

"That is correct."

The General settled back in his chair, swinging his gold eyeglasses daintily.

"How is he going to get that authority?" he asked.

His smile infuriated Wray, who replied quickly.

"By virtue of my control of all companies," he said crisply.

"Your control?" said Bent; "you have no control. I know your resources to a dollar, Mr. Wray. To-day at twelve o'clock your Denver and Saguache Railroad Company stock will be in my possession."

Wray exchanged a glance with Berkely and laughed dryly.

"Oh, you're really coming in with us at last, are you, General?" he said. "That's fine!" And then with a chuckle, "Your name on the directorate of the Denver and Saguache ought to have some weight with the new officers of the Denver and California."

The frown on Bent's brows deepened. The point of this joke did not dawn on him.

"That stock has always been for sale," Wray went on. "Everything I have is for sale when the man comes along who can afford to buy it. It's funny, though, General Bent, that you haven't said anything to *me* about it."

A slight twitching of Bent's lips and the nervous

movement of his fingers among the papers on the table. Was this really a joke or only the last manifestation of Wray's colossal impudence? He chose to think it the latter.

"It hasn't been necessary to say anything to you about it, sir," he said sternly. "To-day at noon two million and a half of that stock is thrown on the market at a bargain — at a very great bargain. But I'm the only man in the United States who would dare to touch it. I'm the only man in the world, except yourself, to whom it's worth a dollar. I know your resources down to the last dime. *You* haven't the money to take it up. I *have*. At noon that stock will be mine, so will you be mine — your two railroads and your smelter, at the price I choose to pay for them."

Jeff sat quietly, one of his hands toying with the top of an inkstand, which he was regarding with friendly interest.

"Are you *sure*, General?" he asked calmly.

General Bent clasped his twitching fingers to keep them still. "Why, sir — what do you mean?"

"That you're mistaken, that's all. That stock is for sale, but you'll still have to come to me to buy it."

"How ——"

"Because I paid off those notes this morning. That stock is in my safe-deposit vault, where it's going to stay—unless" — and he smiled sarcastically — "unless you still want it."

General Bent's face paled and grew red, then

purple. He struggled to his feet with difficulty. His plans didn't often miscarry, and the fact that one of the links of the chain he had tested so carefully had failed to hold completely mystified him. How — where had Jeff Wray succeeded in raising eight hundred thousand dollars when the limit of his borrowing capacity had long ago been reached? For months the wonderful secret organization of the Amalgamated had been at work prying into the affairs of Wray's companies and had figured his possible resources to the thinnest part of a hair. He had not sold the "Lone Tree" or even the smallest interest in it, and yet there he was apparently entrenched as firmly as ever. General Bent gasped in amazement. Only the interposition of Providence could have made such a thing possible. Cortland Bent had gone into the adjoining room suddenly, and Wray knew he was verifying this information over the telephone. But General Bent did not wait for him to return. To his mind this news needed no verification. It was time for him to play his last card — and his best.

"You d — d young scoundrel," he said in a hoarse whisper, his voice trembling with fury, while Wray and Berkely rose angrily and faced him. "I won't mince matters with you any longer. You thought when you stole that mine three years ago that you had covered all your tracks and made yourself safe from civil suits. Mr. Berkely planned well. We fought you in the courts and lost. I suppose you thought we had given up. We did

et up, but it was only to get a firmer hold. We've got it now, and we're going to use it. You stole that mine — trespassed on our property at night and tried to murder one of our employés. You assaulted him and would have killed him if you hadn't been interrupted ——"

"That's a lie!" said Jeff calmly.

"You'll have a chance to prove that. You lured Max Reimer into a gambling den and put him out of business so that he couldn't prevent my son from signing that lease."

"That's another lie! He was drunk and violent and drew a gun on me. My partner struck him down. His head hit the edge of a table."

"Nonsense, sir. We have a witness who verifies Reimer in every particular, who swears he saw from the doorway ——"

"Who is your witness?"

"Fritz Weyl — I see you remember him. He——"

Wray laughed uneasily. "Yes, I remember Fritz?"

Bent came one step nearer, waving a trembling hand at Cortland, who had returned and was trying to restrain him. But the General shook him off.

"We dropped those civil suits because we thought it was wise to do so, and because we knew that in time we would be in a position to win in other ways. There are other processes of law besides the civil ones and those are the ones we choose to take. But [illegible] can leave Denver you'll be arrested on

"'Rita!' he muttered, 'You know?'"

charges of abduction and conspiracy. I suppose you know what that means?"

Jeff grew a shade paler, his eyes blazing their resentment at the old man who stood tottering before him.

"You'd do that — you?" cried Jeff, hoarsely, struggling hard to keep himself under control. "You'd hire men to send me to the penitentiary because I've balked your plans — because I've beaten you in a fair fight against odds — *you? — you?*" Wray clenched his fist and took a step forward, but Larry Berkely seized him by the arm, and Cortland Bent stepped between.

General Bent pushed his son aside.

"Go, Cort — call McCabe. We'll see ——"

At this moment there was an interruption.

"Wait a moment, Cort, please," said a voice.

The door into Mr. Janney's parlor had opened suddenly, and Mrs. Cheyne had entered the room. And while the General eyed her angrily, too amazed to speak, she strode quickly forward into the group and continued quietly,

"There has been a mistake — a terrible mistake. If you'll let me explain ——"

General Bent was the first to recover his senses. "Rita! Leave the room at once!" he commanded.

"No," she said firmly, "not until you hear what I have to say ——"

"I can't listen now — another time," he fumed.

"No, now. I'm going to save you from doing something that you'll regret the rest of your life."

While the General questioned, Jeff had turned and seized her by the arm, his eyes pleading.

"Rita!" he muttered, "You know? . . . . For God's sake, don't! . . . Not now!"

"Yes," she said firmly. "No one else will. I *must.*"

Cornelius Bent and Cortland had watched Wray in amazement. His face had suddenly grown white and drawn.

"You have no right to tell him, Rita," he persisted. "It's my secret! — not yours! You can't! I tell you."

But she eluded him and faced the General.

"You must listen to me, Cousin Cornelius."

Curtis Janney, who had been watching Wray closely, now interposed.

"Let her speak, General. It seems to be something of more than usual importance."

"Very well," he growled, "but be brief."

"I can't tell it here," she insisted. "I must speak to you alone."

"Alone? Why?"

"It's a private matter. Will you come into the next room, there's no one there ——"

She turned and was moving toward the door when Jeff's large figure blocked the way.

"You don't know what you're doing, Rita," he whispered. "You can't. I forbid it." But Berkely, who had been watching the General, took Jeff by the arm and held him by main force.

"Stand aside, sir," said General Bent, roughly

brushing by. "If there's something you want concealed, it's something I want to hear." And he followed, banging the door behind him.

Jeff made a movement as though he would follow — then turned toward Cortland Bent and Janney, who had watched this extraordinary change in the demeanor of their enemy with wonder and some curiosity. Jeff stared at them wildly and took up his hat, saying in a strange voice,

"Come, Larry, I must get away from here — at once," and, opening the door, he fled madly down the corridor.

Berkely paused a moment. "We have no intention of dodging any issues," he said quietly. "If any of you gentlemen want to see Mr. Wray or me, you can find us both at the Wetherall Ranch tomorrow."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CALL OF THE HEART

LARRY caught up with Jeff outside the elevator shaft, where he found him striding up and down like a caged beast. Jeff entered the car in a daze and followed Larry blindly across the huge lobby downstairs and out of doors to a motor which was waiting for them at the curb. Larry was still bewildered at the surprising conclusion of their visit and eyed his companion sharply, but Jeff sat with folded arms, looking neither to the right nor left as they whirled through the city streets and out into the highroad. The hunted look in Jeff's eyes warned Larry not to speak, so he sat beside his partner patiently and waited.

Suddenly, without moving, Jeff's great hand shot out and clinched Larry's knee like a vise.

"He — he's my father, Larry," said Jeff hoarsely, "my father — do you understand? I didn't want him to know."

Larry put his hand over Jeff's and gripped it hard. He knew what other people in Mesa City knew of Jeff's birth, but no words occurred to him. The information had taken his breath away.

"I didn't want him to know," Jeff went on. "I wanted to wait — to tell him myself when things

had broken right for us. I wanted to win — to show him I was his master — not to come crawling and licking his boots for mercy. I'll not do it now, either, by G — d. He can break me to bits, but he'll never own me — I never was his — I never will be ——"

"He hasn't broken us yet, Jeff. He can't keep us out of Pueblo. We're going to win, I tell you."

"We've got to win, Larry," groaned Jeff. "We've *got* to win. That conspiracy charge ——"

"Mere piffle," said Larry. "Don't worry. They've bought Fritz Weyl. He's not a competent witness. I can prove it."

Jeff sank back again, his gaze on the mountains. "He'd send me to Cañon City — to the penitentiary — if he could — and he's — my father."

Larry bit his lip, but didn't reply, for his mind was working rapidly. He had a perspective on the situation which had been denied to Jeff, and the vista did not seem unpleasant. He was prepared to fight for Jeff's interests and his own to the bitter end, but he was too keen a lawyer and too sound a philosopher not to know the value of compromise, and, in spite of himself, it was his legal mind which grapsed the essentials of Jeff's relation to their common enemy. What would be the effect of this astonishing revelation on the mind of General Bent? He did not dare speak of this to Jeff, who in his present mood could only misinterpret him; but he was still thinking of it when the car drew up at the steps at Wetherall's big bungalow palace.

Gretchen and their hostess met the arrivals at the door, and Jeff followed them in slowly. He wanted to be alone again to think — and here was sanctuary. Gretchen paused at the entrance to the morning room, and, taking Jeff by the arm, opened the door, pushed him in quickly, and closed it behind him. And while Jeff was wondering what it all meant he heard a step beside him, felt the timid touch of a hand on his sleeve, and found his eyes looking down into Camilla's.

"Jeff," she was whispering, "they told me you needed me, and so I came to you. Do you want me?"

He looked at her mistily, for the misfortunes which hung about him had dulled his perceptions. It seemed strange that she should be there, but he experienced no surprise at seeing her.

"Yes, I want you," he said absently. "Of course I want you." He fingered the hand on his sleeve and patted it gently, as he would have done a child's, but she saw with pain that the tragedy of his birth now overshadowed all other issues. If he was thinking of her at all, it was of the other Camilla — the Camilla he had known longest — the gingerbread woman that she had been. It hurt her, but she knew that it was her own fault that he could not think otherwise. She took his hand in her own warm fingers, and held it closely against her breast.

"Jeff, dear, look at me. I'm not the woman that I used to be. I'm the real Camilla, now — the Camilla you always hoped I'd be. I'm changed.

Something has happened to me. I want you to understand — I'm not a graven image now, Jeff, I'm just — your wife."

He looked at her, bewildered, but in her eyes he saw that what she said was true. They were different eyes from the ones he had known — softened, darker — and looked up into his own pleadingly, wet with compassion, the tender, compelling eyes of a woman whose soul is awakened. She released his hand and threw her arms around his neck, lifting her face to his. "Don't you understand, Jeff? I want you. I want you. I've never wanted anybody else."

His arms tightened about her, and their lips met. She was tangible now — no mere image to be worshipped from afar, but a warm idol of flesh and blood, to be taken into one's heart and enshrined there.

"Camilla, girl. Is it true?"

"Yes," she whispered, "it has always been true — only I didn't know it. I love you, Jeff. I love you — oh, how I love you! Better than myself — better than all the world. Do you realize it now?"

He took her head between his hands and held it away so that he might look deep into her eyes and be sure. Their lashes dropped once or twice and hid them, but that made them only the more lovely when they opened again. For in them he read the whole measure of his happiness and hers.

"Yes, it's true. I know it now. You've never looked at me like that — never before." He bent her head forward and would have kissed her — as he sometimes used to do — on the forehead — but she would not let him.

"No, not that kiss — the cold kiss of homage, Jeff. I don't want to be venerated. You're not to kiss me like that again — ever. My lips — they're yours, Jeff — my lips . . . No one else — no, never . . . they're yours."

So he took them, and in their sweetness for a while found forgetfulness of his bitterness. At last she led him to a big chair by the window, made him sit, and sank on the floor at his feet.

"You're not going back to Kansas?" he asked anxiously.

She smiled. "Not unless you want me to."

He drew her into his arms again. "I'll never want you to. I want you here — close — close — my girl."

"You must never leave me again, Jeff — I've suffered so."

"I couldn't stand seeing you. I thought you loved ——" She put her fingers over his lips and would not let him finish.

"No — not now —— don't speak of that, it's all a nightmare. But you must never leave me again. I want to be with you always. I want to take my half of your troubles."

His head bowed, the grasp of his hands relaxed, and his eyes stared into vacancy.

"My troubles — yes, there are a lot of them. Perhaps you won't care for me so much when I'm down and out, Camilla. I suppose I ought to tell you. He — my father is going to have me indicted for conspiracy — about the mines. He's going to try to jail me — if he can."

She started up, terror-stricken.

"Oh, he couldn't — even he — couldn't do a thing like that."

"Oh, yes, he could," grimly. "He has bribed Reimer and Fritz Weyl. They swear I tried to murder Max."

"But you didn't, Jeff — tell me you didn't," she said tremulously. "You know you never told me what happened, and I've feared — you were desperate in those days — and lawless."

"I'm desperate and lawless yet," he muttered. "But I'd never try to kill a man just for money. We offered Max Reimer a share in the mine — a good share — but he wanted to hog it all. I told him he was a drunken fool, and he tried to shoot me. Mulrennan struck him, and knocked him out. I wouldn't be here now if he hadn't. I don't know why I never told you. I suppose I thought you wouldn't understand. I left Mulrennan trying to bring him around — and went down and bought that lease. That's all."

"Thank God," she crooned. "I've been so afraid. There have been so many stories."

"Lies — all lies — circulated by him. Now he's got Reimer to swear to them."

She threw her arms around his neck and searched his face anxiously.

"Jeff — he can't make people believe ——"

"He wants to ruin me — and he'll do it if he can. There's no telling what money will do. He squeezed Conrad Seemuller and made him a bankrupt. Seemuller drank himself to death. Jimmy Ott blew out his brains. Oh, don't be afraid — I'm not going to do either — I'm not going to be crushed like a worm. If he ruins me, he'll pay dear for the privilege. I'll drag him down with me, and he'll drop farther than I will. I wanted to keep things quiet but I won't any longer. I'll tell the world my story — his story, and let the world judge between us."

He tramped up and down the floor like a madman until Camilla interposed and led him to a divan. He followed her like a child and let her sit beside him while she questioned him as to what had happened. Jeff had looked for sanctuary, and he had found it at last. The other people in the house did not disturb them, and they sat for a long time alone, exchanging the confidences which had been so long delayed; but they were none the less sweet on that account. Late in the afternoon Camilla questioned Jeff again about the happenings of the morning. Rita Cheyne's part in the situation did not surprise her. She knew that Rita had heard everything and had decided to continue to play the game with Fa[illegible] 'r [illegible]eff's behalf. But she did not tell Jeff so. [illegible] estioned her she told him what had

happened at the Kinney House after he had left.

"Oh, Jeff, I don't know how I could have misjudged you so. Rita opened my eyes — why she chose to do it, I don't know. She's a strange woman — I can't quite make her out even now. She's half angel, half vixen, but I'll never forget her — never!" Camilla put her hand over Jeff's suddenly. "That money — Jeff — you must pay her back that money — if you have to sell the mine."

"I can't sell the mine — not now. It would clean me out."

"I don't care," she pleaded. "I don't want money. It has brought nothing but unhappiness to either of us. I want to begin all over again. I've learned my lesson. I look back to the old days and wonder what I could have been dreaming of. I've seen all I want of the world. Happiness belongs in the heart — no amount of money can buy it a place there. I want to be poor again — with you. Give him — give General Bent what he wants, Jeff — that will satisfy him, won't it? Please, Jeff, for my sake! Sell out the smelter and the mine ——"

"Never!" Jeff's jaw set, and he rose, putting her aside almost roughly.

"I'll never give them up while I've an ounce of blood to fight!"

His tongue faltered and was silent. Camilla followed his startled gaze through the open window at an automobile, from the tonneau of which a man hurriedly descended.

"What can it mean?" Jeff was asking as though to himself. "Cort Bent! What does he want?"

"It's very curious," Camilla said slowly. "To see you ——"

When Bent came into the room a moment later they were both aware of the imminence of important revelations. Camilla had not seen him for two months, and she was conscious of a slight sense of shock at his appearance. Jeff, too, noted that he was very pale and that in his eyes there hung a shadow of the misfortune that had marked them all.

At the door Cortland turned to Mrs. Berkely who had met him in the hall.

"If you don't mind, Gretchen, I'd like to speak to him alone." And, when Camilla would have gone, "No, Camilla, it concerns you, too." While they wondered what was coming he walked past Camilla and put a hand on Jeff's shoulder, the lines in his face softening gently.

"They've told me, Jeff. I know. I've come to offer you my hand." And, as Jeff still stared at him uncertainly, "You won't refuse it, will you!"

There was a nobility in the simple gesture, a depth of meaning in the quiet tones of his voice. Camilla alone knew what those few words were costing him, and she watched Jeff, who was standing as though he had been turned to stone, his head bent forward upon his breast, his deep-set eyes peering under his brows as General Bent's had often done. His eyes found Cortland's at last,

searching them keenly, but he found in them only a small bright flame of fellowship among the embers of regret. Jeff's fingers twitched a little, then his hand came forward impulsively, and the two men clasped hands.

"I'm sorry, Jeff — I am —from the bottom of my heart. I want you to understand."

"I do," said Jeff, with difficulty. "I didn't want you to know ——"

"I'm glad. I think it's better so."

He paused a moment before going on. "I want — I want you and Camilla to go right back with me. Can you? That's what I came to ask. Father is ill."

"Ill?" stammered Jeff.

"A stroke of apoplexy — the sudden shock of discovering all this." Jeff and Camilla started forward with one impulse of horror. "Rita and Aunt Caroline were with him, and Rita had told him the truth — the doctors are there — he has recovered consciousness, but his left side is paralyzed, completely paralyzed."

Jeff sank heavily in a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"What do the doctors say?" asked Camilla anxiously.

"That he's very sick — that's all. Nobody can tell. I've wired Chicago for a specialist. We can only wait and hope. It's pretty desperate — I know that. He's an old man — and he's grown older lately."

Cort stopped speaking and walked to the window,

while Camilla watched him pityingly. He wasn't like the old Cort she used to know, and yet there was something inexpressively appealing in his gentleness which reminded her of the moods in him she had liked the best. She glanced at Jeff. His head was still buried in his hands, and he had not moved. But Camilla knew that this startling revelation was causing a rearrangement of all Jeff's ideas. In that moment she prayed that Jeff's bitterness might be sweetened — that the tragedy which had suddenly stalked among them might soften his heart to pity for the old man who was his father and his enemy.

Cortland turned and spoke with an effort.

"Will you go back with me, Jeff? When he first recovered consciousness he spoke your name. He has been asking for you ever since. He wants——"

Jeff's eyes peered above his trembling fingers.

"He asked — for me?" he said hoarsely.

"Yes — he wants to see you."

Jeff's head sank into his hands again.

"He wants — to see *me?* I can't — seem to realize——"

"It's true — he asked me to bring you."

There was a long period of silence, during which Jeff's long, bony fingers clasped and unclasped back of his head as he struggled with himself. "I can't," he groaned at last. "I can't. It has been too long — too much." He straightened in disorder and went on wildly: "Why, he has dogged my steps for months — used all his genius and cunning to

do away with me — tried to rid himself of me as he did years ago — and even hired men to swear my liberty away." His head dropped into his hands again and he leaned forward, his elbows on his knees. "No, I can't, Cort. I can't. It's too much to ask — too much."

Cortland stood in the middle of the floor, his arms folded, head bent, waiting for the storm to pass, his own pain engulfed in the greater pain of the man before him. He did not try to answer Jeff, for there was no answer to be made. It was not a moment for words, and he knew he had no right even to petition. It was a matter for Jeff's heart alone — a heart so long embittered that even if it refused this charity, Cortland could not find it in his own heart to condemn.

With a glance at Cortland, Camilla went over to Jeff and laid her fingers lightly on his shoulder.

"Jeff," she said with gentle firmness, "you must go — to your father." But, as he did not move, she went on. "You forget — he did not know. Perhaps if he had known he would have tried to make atonement before. Do you realize what it means for a man like General Bent to make such a request at such a time? You can't refuse, Jeff. You can't."

Jeff moved his head and stared for a long time at the fireplace, his fingers clenched on the chair arms, turning at last to Cortland.

"Do you — do you think he'll die?" he asked. "What do they say?"

"His heart is bad," said Cort gravely. "I don't know — a man of father's years seldom recovers from a thing like that ——"

But it was Camilla who interposed. She stepped between the two men and took Jeff by the arm. "Cort can't go back without you, Jeff," she said passionately. "Don't you see that? He can't. You've got to go. If your father died to-night you'd never forgive yourself. He may have done you a wrong, but God knows he's trying to right it now. You've got to let him." Cortland watched them a moment, then suddenly straightened and glanced at his watch.

"I can't stay here any longer," he said. "I've got to go back to him. There is much to be done, and I'm the only one to do it. This is my last plea — not that of a dying man's son for his father, but of a brother to a brother for the father of both. Come back with me — Jeff. Not for his sake — but for your own. It is your own blood that is calling you — pitifully — you can't refuse."

Jeff struggled heavily to his feet and passed his hands across his eyes, and then, with a sudden sharp intake of his breath, he turned to Cortland, his lips trembling.

"I'll go," he said hoarsely. "If he wants me, I'll go, Cort. Something is drawing me — something inside of me that awoke when you told me what had happened. I've been fighting against it, the habit of thirty years was fighting it, but I've got to go. I'd be cursed if I didn't. You're sure he really wants me, Cort?"

CHAPTER XXVII

GENERAL BENT

THE room at the hotel into which Cortland showed them was a part of General Bent's own suite. Curtis Janney and a doctor consulted near the window, and a nurse from the hospital, in her white linen uniform and cap, hovered near. Jeff's questioning gaze sought the crack of the door of the darkened room adjoining.

"I think you may go in, Mr. Bent," said the doctor to Cortland. "He's conscious at longer intervals now. It looks very much more hopeful, sir. He still asks for Mr. Wray."

Cortland followed the doctor into the sick room, while Janney joined Jeff and Camilla and waited.

"Will he — get over it, Mr. Janney?" Camilla asked softly.

"Oh, I think so now — we didn't at first. Only one side is affected. He can even move the hand a little. Of course, it may be a long time."

Jeff listened in a daze. The baby stare had come into his eyes again, and it moved from one object in the room to another — always returning to the door of the darkened room into which Cortland had vanished. There was an odor of medicine, the sound of crackling ice, and now the murmur of

voices. A moment later one of the nurses appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Wray," she said, "you may come in."

And Jeff entered, passing Cortland, who stood with bowed head at the door. In the darkness he could just make out the white figure of the old man propped up against the pillows. He breathed with difficulty, and Jeff, unused to scenes of sickness, felt all his heart go out in pity for the helpless old man who was calling for him.

"Is he here?" the General murmured. "Is he here?"

Jeff moved quietly around the bed to the chair which the nurse had placed for him, "Yes, sir," he said huskily. "It's Jeff."

The General's right hand groped feebly along the covers, and Jeff took it in both of his own. "Cort told me you wanted me, sir."

"I'm glad — very glad." He turned his head and tried to smile. "It was — so — so sudden — the news," he said with an effort, "to find out —— "

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't want you to know."

"I'm glad to know. It makes me — happy. I've been trying for so many years to find you."

"You tried?" in astonishment.

"Yes, I didn't know anything about — about having a son — until it was too late. One of my associates — in the West — told me later. I tried to find out — where they had taken you, but the nurse in the hospital — had gone — and there was no record of her — or of — of you." He spoke

with a great effort, striving against the drowsiness which from time to time attacked him. "They did things — differently in those days. She — your mother — never mentioned my name. We had had a quarrel — a serious quarrel — just after we were married —— "

"Married?" Jeff leaned forward over the white coverlid toward the old man's distorted face. "You were married?" he whispered, awe-stricken.

"Yes, married, Jeff — married — I — I have the papers — at home — I'll show them to you —— "

Jeff bent his head suddenly over the old man's lean fingers and kissed them impulsively.

"Married!" he murmured, "Thank God! Thank God for that."

The General's eyes followed him plaintively, while he struggled for breath. "Yes, it's true. In Topeka — Kansas. That's what I wanted to tell you. I couldn't go — I couldn't die without letting you know that. It didn't matter to her —she could forget. I did her a wrong, but not a great wrong, as I did you. I've thought about you all these years, Jeff. It's my secret — I've kept it a long time —— "

He sank back into his pillows, exhausted, breathing heavily again, and the doctor who had stood in the doorway came forward. "I think you had better rest, General. Mr. Wray can come in later." But the General resolutely waved him aside with a movement that suggested his old authority.

"No, not yet— I'm better — I'll sleep again in a

moment." And, as the doctor withdrew; the old man's grasp on Jeff's hand grew tighter. "They took you away from the hospital — without even giving you a name."

"Yes, sir — I had no name but the one they gave me." Jeff tried to make him stop talking, but he went on, striving desperately:

"I had men working — to try and find you. I've their reports at home — you shall see them. I want you to know that I did all I could. We got the name of the nurse."

"Mrs. Nixon?"

"I think — no," he said confusedly. "I can't remember — she disappeared —— "

"Yes, sir. She married again and went to Texas. She took me with her."

Bent's eyes searched Jeff's piteously. "That was it," he whispered, "that was it. That's my excuse — I tried, you know I tried, don't you? It has been my burden for years — more even lately — than when I was younger — the wrong I had done you. Say that you understand — won't you — my — my — son?"

The tears had come into Jeff's eyes, welled forth like the gush of water in a dry fountain, and fell upon the old wrinkled fingers.

"I do, sir — I do."

The General's hand left the coverlid and rested for a moment on Jeff's shoulder.

"I hoped you would. I've always hoped you'd forgive me when you knew."

Jeff straightened and brushed his eyes. "There's nothing to forgive. I — I only want you to get well — you will, sir. They say you're better."

"Yes, Jeff, better — better already — but I'm very tired. I think — I think — I can sleep now — but don't go away — don't go," and he sank back in a state of coma.

General Bent recovered. The stroke was a slight one, and he gained strength and the use of his faculties rapidly. But Time had served its notice of dispossession, and they all knew that the hour had come when the management of Bent's great business interests must pass to younger hands. Within a few weeks he was permitted to sit up for an hour each day, and with Cortland's help took up the loose ends of the most urgent business. But he tired easily, and it was evident to them all that the days of his activity were ended.

In spite of it all, a great calm had fallen over the General's spirit. The quick decision, the incisive judgment, were still his — for one doesn't forget in a moment the habits of a lifetime of command — but his tones were softer, his manner more gentle, and in his eyes there had dawned a soft light of toleration and benignity which became him strangely.

Gladys, who had come on from Lakewood, was with him constantly and watched these changes in her father with timid wonder. He had never been one to confide in his children, and it required some readjustment of her relations with him to accept the quiet appeal of his eyes and the sympathy and ap-

preciation which she found in his newly begotten tenderness. In Cortland, too, she saw a great change, and it surprised her to discover the resolute, unobtrusive way in which he met his responsibilities, both functional and moral. Jeff and Camilla, aware of their anomalous position, had decided to leave the hotel and go back to Mesa City as soon as General Bent grew better. It was Cortland who prevailed on them to stay.

"We're all one family now, Jeff," he said firmly, "one and indivisible. Gladys and I are of a mind on that, and father wishes it so. Your claim on him comes before ours — we don't forget that — we don't want to forget it."

Jeff, unable to reply, only grasped him by the hand. And then, with Larry's help, the two of them plunged into the business of straightening out the tangle in the General's affairs and Jeff's. It was a matter of moment with Cortland to give the Saguache Short Line a proper schedule at once, and so by his dispensation on the twenty-fifth of May, as Jeff had boasted (he thought of it now), trains were running from Pueblo to Saguache. The Denver and Western, too, restored its old schedule from Kinney, and the Saguache Mountain Development Company resumed its business by really developing.

In the absence of his two sons, Camilla and Gladys sat with the old man, reading or talking to him as the fancy seized him to have them do. He liked to lie on a couch at the window and look out toward

the mountains beyond which Jeff's interests lay, while Camilla told him of her husband's early struggles in the Valley. He questioned her eagerly, often repeating himself, while she told him of the "Watch Us Grow" sign, of the failure of Mesa City, and of its rejuvenescence.

"Perhaps, after all," the old man would sigh, "perhaps it did him no harm. It makes me very happy, child." He didn't say what made him happy, but Camilla knew.

Then there came a day when the General was pronounced out of all danger and capable of resuming a small share of his old responsibilities. On that day new articles of partnership were drawn for the firm of Bent & Company, into which Jeff Wray was now admitted. The "Lone Tree" mine and the Saguache Smelter figured in the transaction. Mrs. Cheyne, who had a wise corner in her pretty head, refused to accept the money which had been advanced to Jeff Wray, and now insisted on bonds of the Development Company and stock in the Short Line. Lawrence Berkely, whose peace had been made with Curtis Janney, now became the Western representative of the Amalgamated Reduction Company, with Pete Mulrennan as actual head of the Mesa City plant. It was from General Bent that all of the plans emanated, and Curtis Janney without difficulty succeeded in arranging matters in New York. He took a sardonic pleasure in reminding the General that he had once suggested the advisability of using Jeff's talents for the benefit

of their company — and accepted these plans as a slight tribute to his own wisdom.

General Bent wanted to go up to Mesa City to see the mine, but it was thought best by the doctors to send him East to a lower altitude, and so, about the middle of June, Cortland took him to New York, leaving Jeff and Camilla to stay for a while at Mesa City, where Camilla could watch the building of "Glen Irwin." She could not find it in her heart to give up the West — not altogether. Later on they would spend their summers there — up in the mountains — Jeff's mountains.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOUSEHOLD GODS — AND GODDESSES

THE years which followed seemed very short ones to Camilla — a time of quiet delight, of restitution, and fulfillment. General Bent had wanted them to come and live with him in the old house down in Madison Avenue, and Jeff, in his whole-hearted way, had given him the promise, but it was Camilla who had thought it wisest for them to have an establishment of their own. The house was just off the avenue near the Park, a rented place, for Camilla had not yet arrived at the state of mind to consider New York their home. But most of Jeff's time was now spent in New York — seven months of the year at least — and she was beginning to learn with reluctance that before long only their summers could be spent at "Glen Irwin." On certain afternoons Camilla sat in the library downstairs with her embroidery-frame (she always seemed to be sewing now), her lap covered with thin, flimsy fabrics, the borders of which she was embellishing. They were very tiny pieces of material, apparently shapeless, but from time to time she held them at arm's length before her, her head on one side, and smiled approval of her own handiwork. It was here that Jeff liked to find her — thus occupied. He had

not even contracted the habit of stopping at a club on the way uptown, and unless he was detained on important matters she knew when she would hear the sound of his key in the latch outside.

Mrs. Wray had made it known that she was not at home except to the chosen few. The General came on certain days for his "toddy," Gladys on the way home from "teaing it," Mrs. Rumsen, Dolly Haviland, and Rita Cheyne, each for a peep behind the curtain.

Rita Cheyne came oftenest and stayed longest. She had no social responsibilities, she claimed, except that of seeing the small garments in Camilla's lap made successfully. She was hopelessly bored, more demurely cheerful, more buoyantly pessimistic than ever.

"What a joy it must be," she sighed, "to have an object in life. My objects are all subjective. I have a dreadful fear that I'm getting to be a philosopher."

Camilla bit off her thread and smiled.

"Platonic?" she asked.

"I'm afraid so. I used to take such desperate fancies to people. I used to want to make people like me whether they wanted to or not. Now I'm really indifferent. I actually don't care whether my hat is on straight or not. It's such a pity. I used to like to be *svelte*, fluffy, and smartly groomed. I didn't mind suffering the tortures of the rack if I knew I was effective. Now — I'm positively dowdy. I don't care what I wear so long as I'm comfortable

— and I'm actually getting *fat*, Camilla! The horror of it!"

Camilla looked up at the exquisite afternoon frock, which fitted her slender figure as only one made by Patrain could, and smiled.

"Yes, Rita, positively corpulent. It's a pity. You really had a good figure once."

"The worst of it is that I don't seem to care," she went on, oblivious. "I used to love to dress for moods — for my moods and for other people's. I thought that Art could solve every problem that came to me. Art!" she sniffed contemptuously. "Art in a woman is merely a confession of inefficiency. I used to think that Art was immortal. Now I find that only Nature is."

Camilla lifted the tiny sacque with its absurd blue silk cuffs and examined it with a satisfied air. When she had finished she leaned over to Rita and whispered with the air of an oracle:

"Nature *is* — immortal."

"It is. You're right," she sighed. "But it's *my* nature to be merely mortal — and I'm going to die very hard. I must continue to hide my inefficiencies — by Art."

"You're not inefficient," Camilla corrected. "You're merely feminine—extravagantly feminine——"

"Yes, feminine — but not womanly. Oh, I know what I am!" she concluded fiercely.

"You're a darling!" said Camilla softly. "You're very much more womanly than you want people

to think you are. Why should you take such a delight in *these?*" Camilla laid a hand on the wicker basket beside her.

Rita took up one of the tiny garments and examined it with minute interest.

"It's very pretty, isn't it? But quite silly. Imagine anything so tiny! What a lot of trouble you take. And you've made them all yourself. They're really exquisite."

"They're Art's tribute to Nature, Rita," said Camilla with an air of finality.

Mrs. Cheyne sighed.

"My mission in life is ended, Camilla. I'm quite sure of it now. You've convinced me. I'm actually envious of a woman who sits by the fire and sews baby-clothes. Your industry is a reproach — your smile a reproof and your happiness a condemnation. I know you're right. You've really solved the problem, and I haven't. I never will. I'm past that now. I'm going to grow old ungracefully, yielding the smallest fraction of an inch at a time to the inevitable. I'm going to be stout, I know it — and probably dumpy. I could weep, Camilla."

"Who's talking of weeping here?" said a voice. And General Bent, with his stick, came thumping in. "Oh — you, Rita?" he laughed. "Women never cry unless there's something to be gained by it." Rita offered him her cheek, and Camilla rang for tea. In a moment Mrs. Rumsen came in.

"I knew you were here, Rita," she said, bending her tall figure for a caress.

"How?"

"Teddy Wetherby's machine — at the corner — and Teddy."

"Is he waiting still? Such a nice boy — but absolutely oblivious of the passage of time."

"I thought you'd given up your kindergarten, Rita," put in Camilla, laughing.

"I have. But Teddy is my prize pupil. He's taking a post-graduate course." And, when they all laughed at her, she turned on them severely. "I won't have you laughing at Teddy. He's really an angel."

"I'm going to tell his mother," said Mrs. Rumsen.

Rita took her tea cup and sank back in her chair absently. "Oh, well — perhaps you'd better," she said. "I'm going in for square-toed shoes and settlement meetings."

The General grunted and sipped his Scotch, but when Jeff and Cortland came in the women were still laughing at Mrs. Cheyne. Jeff walked across the room to his wife and kissed her.

"Father — Aunt Caroline — Hello! Rita."

"Well, sir — " from Camilla, "please give an account of yourself."

"You'll have to speak to Cort. We stopped in at the Club for a minute. Cheyne was there and Hal Dulaney, Perot, Steve Gillis, Douglas Warrington, and two or three others. They wanted us to stay for dinner. But we didn't."

"Of course not," said Camilla so decisively that Rita Cheyne laughed.

"There!" she said pityingly. "Oh, Jeff! a subject and a slave as well! Aren't you really going to let him go, Camilla?"

Camilla looked up into Jeff's face with a heavenly smile.

"Of course — if he *wants* to."

"But I *don't* want to," said Jeff, sinking into a chair with a comfortable sigh. "This is good enough for me. Besides," he added mischievously, "it looked like a meeting."

"What kind of a meeting?"

"Of the Rita Cheyne Protective Association."

"Jeff, you're horrid!" said Rita, but she laughed.

"I'm not," he said calmly. "They have my full sympathy and support. I told 'em so."

"Your sins are finding you out, my dear cousin," chuckled the General. "They always do in the end."

"Oh, you're hopeless — *all* of you," sighed the culprit, setting down her tea cup.

Cortland finished his drink in leisurely fashion and dropped into the vacant chair beside his father. "Well, we put it over," he said quietly.

"The bond issue?"

"Yes, sir — we had a fight in the board, but we got McIntyre's vote at last and jammed it through — that was all we needed."

"I didn't think it was possible," the old man exclaimed.

"It wasn't easy, but Jeff managed it."

"I didn't sir," Jeff interposed. "Cort did the whole thing. We've made him president. We made it unanimous in the end."

"By George, Cort, I'm proud of you. I always knew you had the stuff in you if we ever woke you up."

"Oh, I guess I'm awake all right. A fellow has to be down there." He leaned forward and picked up an article on the work basket.

"Where's His Majesty?" he asked of Mrs. Wray.

Camilla glanced at the clock.

"Asleep, I hope. He's been very dissipated lately. He was up yesterday until seven."

"Takes after his father," said Mrs. Cheyne scornfully.

At that moment a small cry was heard upstairs, and Camilla flew. "The lamb!" she cried, and from the hall they heard her telling the trained nurse to bring the infant down. At the bottom of the steps she met them and bore him triumphantly in. He was a very small person with large round blue eyes that stared like Jeff's. They looked at nobody in particular, and yet they were filled with the wisdom of the ages.

"What a little owl he is!" said Rita, but when she jangled her gold purse before his eyes he seized it with both hands and gurgled exultantly.

"He knows a good thing when he sees it," laughed Cort. "Got the gold fever, too."

"What a shame!" said Camilla indignantly. "He hasn't any kind of a fever, have you, Cornelius?"

The child said, "Da!"

"Didn't I tell you? He knows."

"He has such fuzzy pink hair!" said Cort, rubbing it the wrong way. "Do you think it will stay pink?"

"You sha'n't be godfather to my son if you say another word, Cortland. Here, nurse, take him. They sha'n't abuse him any longer." She pressed her lips rapturously against his rosy cheek and released him. Mrs. Rumsen gazed through her lorgnon, while the infant, with a cry of delight, pulled the glasses from the General's nose.

"No respect for age! None at all!" said Mrs. Rumsen.

After a while they all went away — Rita Cheyne to her post-graduate pupil, Mrs. Rumsen to her brougham, and Cort and his father to the walk downtown, leaving Camilla and Jeff sitting at the fireside alone. One armchair was big enough for them both. She sat on his knees and leaned back against him, close in the shelter of his arms.

"You didn't want to stay out to dinner, did you, Jeff?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," he said, "of course I did. I'm very fond of dining out."

She laughed contentedly. They had dined out

only once this winter, and that was at his father's house. There was a long silence.

"Poor Rita," she sighed at last, "what's to become of her? She's not really happy, Jeff. I sometimes think—— " she paused.

"What?"

"That she still thinks of you."

Jeff laughed. "I hope she does. Why, silly?"

"Simply because she never gives me the slightest reason to think that she does."

Jeff rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"That's one too many for me."

"Don't you know that a woman always judges another woman by the thoughts she suppresses?"

"That's nonsense."

"No, it isn't. I won't have you say that what I think is nonsense."

She turned her head toward him and looked down into his eyes.

"Are you sure you never cared for Rita? Not a little?"

"Sure."

"It was the Forbidden Way, Jeff. Do you like this way — *our* way — better?"

He held her closer in his arms and that reply seemed adequate. She asked him no more questions until some moments later, and she asked him that one because she always liked the way he answered it.

A sudden loud rasping of the dining-room hangings on their brass rod, and Camilla sprang up hurriedly. She even had time to go to the mantel mirror and rearrange the disorder of her hair before the butler came in to announce dinner.

He was a well-trained servant.

THE END

TITLES SELECTED FROM

GROSSET & DUNLAP'S LIST

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

HIS HOUR. By Elinor Glyn. Illustrated.

A beautiful blonde Englishwoman visits Russia, and is violently made love to by a young Russian aristocrat. A most unique situation complicates the romance.

THE GAMBLERS. By Charles Klein and Arthur Hornblow. Illustrated by C. E. Chambers.

A big, vital treatment of a present day situation wherein men play for big financial stakes and women flourish on the profits—or repudiate the methods.

CHEERFUL AMERICANS. By Charles Battell Loomis. Illustrated by Florence Scovel Shinn and others.

A good, wholesome, laughable presentation of some Americans at home and abroad, on their vacations, and during their hours of relaxation.

THE WOMAN OF THE WORLD. By Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

Clever, original presentations of present day social problems and the best solutions of them. A book every girl and woman should possess.

THE LIGHT THAT LURES. By Percy Brebner.

Illustrated. Handsomely colored wrapper.

A young Southerner who loved Lafayette, goes to France to aid him during the days of terror, and is lured in a certain direction by the lovely eyes of a Frenchwoman.

THE RAMRODDERS. By Holman Day. Frontispiece by Harold Matthews Brett.

A clever, timely story that will make politicians think and will make women realize the part that politics play—even in their romances.

Ask for complete free list of G. & D. Popular Copyrighted Fiction

GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th ST., NEW YORK

TITLES SELECTED FROM

GROSSET & DUNLAP'S LIST

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

THE SECOND WIFE. By Thompson Buchanan. Illustrated by W. W. Fawcett. Harrison Fisher wrapper printed in four colors and gold.

An intensely interesting story of a marital complication in a wealthy New York family involving the happiness of a beautiful young girl.

TESS OF THE STORM COUNTRY. By Grace Miller White. Illustrated by Howard Chandler Christy.

An amazingly vivid picture of low class life in a New York college town, with a heroine beautiful and noble, who makes a great sacrifice for love.

FROM THE VALLEY OF THE MISSING. By Grace Miller White.

Frontispiece and wrapper in colors by Penrhyn Stanlaws.

Another story of "the storm country." Two beautiful children are kidnapped from a wealthy home and appear many years after showing the effects of a deep, malicious scheme behind their disappearance.

THE LIGHTED MATCH. By Charles Neville Buck. Illustrated by R. F. Schabelitz.

A lovely princess travels incognito through the States and falls in love with an American man. There are ties that bind her to someone in her own home, and the great plot revolves round her efforts to work her way out.

MAUD BAXTER. By C. C. Hotchkiss. Illustrated by Will Grefe.

A romance both daring and delightful, involving an American girl and a young man who had been impressed into English service during the Revolution.

THE HIGHWAYMAN. By Guy Rawlence. Illustrated by Will Grefe.

A French beauty of mysterious antecedents wins the love of an Englishman of title. Devolopments of a startling character and a clever untangling of affairs hold the reader's interest.

THE PURPLE STOCKINGS. By Edward Salisbury Field. Illustrated in colors; marginal illustrations.

A young New York business man, his pretty sweetheart, his sentimental stenographer, and his fashionable sister are all mixed up in a misunderstanding that surpasses anything in the way of comedy in years. A story with a laugh on every page.

Ask for complete free list of G. & D. Popular Copyrighted Fiction

GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th ST., NEW YORK

TITLES SELECTED FROM

GROSSET & DUNLAP'S LIST

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list

A CERTAIN RICH MAN. By William Allen White.

A vivid, startling portrayal of one man's financial greed, its wide spreading power, its action in Wall Street, and its effect on the three women most intimately in his life. A splendid, entertaining American novel.

IN OUR TOWN. By William Allen White. Illustrated by F. R. Gruger and W. Glackens.

Made up of the observations of a keen newspaper editor, involving the town millionaire, the smart set, the literary set, the bohemian set, and many others. All humorously related and sure to hold the attention.

NATHAN BURKE. By Mary S. Watts.

The story of an ambitious, backwoods Ohio boy who rose to prominence. Everyday humor of American rustic life permeates the book.

THE HIGH HAND. By Jacques Futrelle. Illustrated by Will Grefe.

A splendid story of the political game, with a son of the soil on the one side, and a "kid glove" politician on the other. A pretty girl, interested in both men, is the chief figure.

THE BACKWOODSMEN. By Charles G. D. Roberts. Illustrated.

Realistic stories of men and women living midst the savage beauty of the wilderness. Human nature at its best and worst is well protrayed.

YELLOWSTONE NIGHTS. By Herbert Quick.

A jolly company of six artists, writers and other clever folks take a trip through the National Park, and tell stories around camp fire at night. Brilliantly clever and original.

THE PROFESSOR'S MYSTERY. By Wells Hastings and Brian Hooker. Illustrated by Hanson Booth.

A young college professor, missing his steamer for Europe, has a romantic meeting with a pretty girl, escorts her home, and is enveloped in a big mystery.

Ask for complete free list of G. & D. Popular Copyrighted Fiction

GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th ST., NEW YORK

TITLES SELECTED FROM

GROSSET & DUNLAP'S LIST

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list

THE SIEGE OF THE SEVEN SUITORS. By Meredith Nicholson. Illustrated by C. Coles Phillips and Reginald Birch.

Seven suitors vie with each other for the love of a beautiful girl, and she subjects them to a test that is full of mystery, magic and sheer amusement.

THE MAGNET. By Henry C. Rowland. Illustrated by Clarence F. Underwood.

The story of a remarkable courtship involving three pretty girls on a yacht, a poet-lover in pursuit, and a mix-up in the names of the girls.

THE TURN OF THE ROAD. By Eugenia Brooks Frothingham.

A beautiful young opera singer chooses professional success instead of love, but comes to a place in life where the call of the heart is stronger than worldly success.

SCOTTIE AND HIS LADY. By Margaret Morse. Illustrated by Harold M. Brett.

A young girl whose affections have been blighted is presented with a Scotch Collie to divert her mind, and the roving adventures of her pet lead the young mistress into another romance.

SHEILA VEDDER. By Amelia E. Barr. Frontispiece by Harrison Fisher.

A very beautiful romance of the Shetland Islands, with a handsome, strong willed hero and a lovely girl of Gaelic blood as heroine. A sequel to "Jan Vedder's Wife."

JOHN WARD, PREACHER. By Margaret Deland.

The first big success of this much loved American novelist. It is a powerful portrayal of a young clergyman's attempt to win his beautiful wife to his own narrow creed.

THE TRAIL OF NINETY-EIGHT. By Robert W. Service. Illustrated by Maynard Dixon.

One of the best stories of "Vagabondia" ever written, and one of the most accurate and picturesque of the stampede of gold seekers to the Yukon. The love story embedded in the narrative is strikingly original,

Ask for complete free list of G. & D. Popular Copyrighted Fiction

GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th ST., NEW YORK

A FEW OF

GROSSET & DUNLAP'S

Great Books at Little Prices

THE MUSIC MASTER. By Charles Klein. Illustrated by John Rae.

This marvelously vivid narrative turns upon the search of a German musician in New York for his little daughter. Mr. Klein has well portrayed his pathetic struggle with poverty, his varied experiences in endeavoring to meet the demands of a public not trained to an appreciation of the classic, and his final great hour when, in the rapidly shifting events of a big city, his little daughter, now a beautifnl young woman, is brought to his very door. A superb bit of fiction, palpitating with the life of the great metropolis. The play in which David Warfield scored his highest success.

DR. LAVENDAR'S PEOPLE. By Margaret Deland. Illustrated by Lucius Hitchcock.

Mrs. Deland won so many friends through Old Chester Tales that this volume needs no introduction beyond its title. The lovable doctor is more ripened in this later book, and the simple comedies and tragedies of the old village are told with dramatic charm.

OLD CHESTER TALES. By Margaret Deland. Illustrated by Howard Pyle.

Stories portraying with delightful humor and pathos a quaint people in a sleepy old town. Dr. Lavendar, a very human and lovable "preacher," is the connecting link between these dramatic stories from life.

HE FELL IN LOVE WITH HIS WIFE. By E. P. Roe. With frontispiece.

The hero is a farmer—a man with honest, sincere views of life. Bereft of his wife, his home is cared for by a succession of domestics of varying degrees of inefficiency until, from a most unpromising source, comes a young woman who not only becomes his wife but command [illegible] his respect and eventually wins his love. A bright and delicate r[illegible]nce, revealing on both sides a love that surmounts all difficulties [illegible] survives the censure of friends as well as the bitterness of en[illegible].

"IE YC[illegible] By Elizabeth Miller.

Against [illegible]orical background of the days when the children of Israel [illegible]vered from the bondage of Egypt [illegible] sketched [illegible]ce of compelling charm. A [illegible] as any si[illegible] Hur."

SAUL [illegible]ARSUS. By Elizabeth [illegible]

An [illegible]taigne.

The [illegible] this story are laid in [illegible] and De[illegible] The Apostle Paul [illegible] Agrip[illegible]rors Tiberius [illegible] might [illegible]e through [illegible] tions, [illegible] most [illegible]

GR[illegible]

A FEW OF

GROSSET & DUNLAP'S
Great Books at Little Prices

WHEN A MAN MARRIES. By Mary Roberts Rinehart. Illustrated by Harrison Fisher and Mayo Bunker.

A young artist, whose wife had recently divorced him, finds that a visit is due from his Aunt Selina, an elderly lady having ideas about things quite apart from the Bohemian set in which her nephew is a shining light. The way in which matters are temporarily adjusted forms the motif of the story.

A farcical extravaganza, dramatized under the title of "Seven Days"

THE FASHIONABLE ADVENTURES OF JOSHUA CRAIG. By David Graham Phillips. Illustrated.

A young westerner, uncouth and unconventional, appears in political and social life in Washington. He attains power in politics, and a young woman of the exclusive set becomes his wife, undertaking his education in social amenities.

"DOC." GORDON. By Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman. Illustrated by Frank T. Merrill.

Against the familiar background of American town life, the author portrays a group of people strangely involved in a mystery. "Doc." Gordon, the one physician of the place, Dr. Elliot, his assistant, a beautiful woman and her altogether charming daughter are all involved in the plot. A novel of great interest.

HOLY ORDERS. By Marie Corelli.

A dramatic story, in which is pictured a clergyman in touch with society people, stage favorites, simple village folk, powerful financiers and others, each presenting vital problems to this man "in holy orders"—problems that we are now struggling with in America.

KATRINE. By Elinor Macartney Lane. With frontispiece.

Katrine, the heroine of this story, is a lovely Irish girl, of lowly birth, but gifted with a beautiful voice.

The narrative is based on the facts of an actual singer's career, and the viewpoint throughout is a most exalted one.

THE FORTUNES OF FIFI. By Molly Elliot Seawell. Illustrated by T. de Thulstrup.

A story of life in France at the time of the first Napoleon. Fifi, a glad, mad little actress of eighteen, is the star performer in a third rate Parisian theatre. A story as dainty as a Watteau painting.

SHE THAT HESITATES. By Harris Dickson. Illustrated by C. W. Relyea.

The scene of this dashing romance shifts from Dresden to St. Petersburg in the reign of Peter the Great, and then to New Orleans.

The hero is a French Soldier of Fortune, and the princess, who hesitates—but you must read the story to know how she that hesitates may be lost and yet saved.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, 526 WEST 26th ST., NEW YORK